

2. The commission of a prophet

October 24, 2013

Being called by God to be His messenger is an awesome responsibility as well as an extreme privilege. I know that there are many earthly qualified people other than me, but He chose to include me in the ranks of His messengers, not because of my intelligence, nor because of my education, certainly not because of my look.

The Lord chose me because when the people hear God's Word through me, they would say, "This message is from the Lord, obviously not from a man." I get a thrill that I am used for His glory and that is my reward. And I get to do all that in the safety of a free country, well, at least for now.

But for Ezekiel, it was opposite. He was ordained as a priest at the age of thirty while he was a captive in the hostile territory of Babylon. Then he was called to be a prophet by the Lord. Being a prophet of God could be hazardous for one's health during that time.

The kingdom of Judah had suffered greatly at the hands of Babylon, and many Jewish people wondered if Jehovah God was still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Were the Jews not God's chosen people? Yet now His chosen people were exiles in a pagan land, their Promised Land was devastated, Jerusalem was in enemy hands, and the temple had been robbed of its precious treasures.

However, with the exception of very few, the majority of the Jews had never thought that they were getting what they deserved as the punishment from the Lord.

A. THE VISION OF GOD'S GLORY

Ezekiel 1:1-3 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 2 On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, 3 the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

The River Chebar which was a canal flowed from the Euphrates River, south of the city of Babylon, where the Jewish exiles gathered for prayer. Apparently Ezekiel was there interceding with the other captives when the Lord called him to his new ministry as Isaiah was worshiping in the temple when God called him.

I want you to pay attention on two things that I asked you to underline. The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel in the form of a vision for special service. The phrase "the word of the Lord came" is used fifty times in Ezekiel's prophecy and speaks of the authority of his message. And "the hand of the Lord" is found several times as well. The word of the Lord brings enlightenment and the hand of the Lord enablement.

The vision of v4-28 comprises the divine presentation before Ezekiel's commission. This vision has bewildered many people and has discouraged them from continuing their study of this Book. Three principles of this hermeneutical system are especially important when interpreting visions that were mentioned in the Bible:

1) **Follow the divine interpretations normally accompanying the visions. These divine interpretations concentrate on the overall concept rather than on details.**

2) Be keenly aware of parallel passages and the harmony of Scripture, since the prophets normally sought to apply future revelations of God to their current situations. The general prophetic message among the prophets is essentially the same.

3) Use the same approach with the symbols and imagery of visionary literature as used with figurative language. Thus symbols and imagery are properly understood as figures and are not to be taken literally.

Another important thing which I mentioned last time, but hear me anyway. As he describes this vision, Ezekiel uses the words "like" and "likeness" at least twenty-five times, indicating that what he saw was symbolic of realities God wanted to reveal to him. Throughout the Bible, the Lord allowed His human writers to use familiar things to illustrate spiritual truths that are beyond human vocabulary and description.

Some Bible scholars go in extensions to explain away what the four living creatures, the four wheels, and the firmament are. I am not going to do that because it would be nothing more than a guessing game and speculations of my part. But these things Ezekiel described point to one: the glory of God.

Ezekiel 1:28b This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

It was a really dark day for Israel, and the first thing Ezekiel needed to understand was that, no matter how discouraging the circumstances, God was still on the throne accomplishing His divine purposes in the world. There are many unexplained mysteries in the vision Ezekiel had, but one message comes through with clarity and power: Jehovah God is the sovereign Lord of Israel and of all the nations of the earth.

It seems that this applies to us as well. America once was a proud Christian nation of which God was the center of our government affairs. Now they forgot all about the Lord God who protected her from enemies. God's judgment is at hand and it is already on this land. Our God is the sovereign Lord and He can not be ignored.

B. THE COMMISSION OF A PROPHET

Ezekiel 2:1-10 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you." 2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. 3 And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 5 As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse --for they are a rebellious house --yet they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 "And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. 7 You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. 8 But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." 9 Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. 10 Then He spread it before me; and

there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe.

Ezekiel was now to receive his official commission as a prophet of the Lord God, and the Lord told him he was facing a very difficult task. Whether it's raising a family, teaching a Bible study class, shepherding a church, or evangelizing in a distant nation, we have to accept people as they are before we can lead them to what God wants them to be. God gave Ezekiel four important commandments to obey:

1) Stand and Listen – v1-2

Ezekiel is called "son of man" 93 times in this Book, a title that the Lord also gave to Daniel. "Son of man" is also a messianic title which the Lord Jesus applied to Himself at least 82 times when He was ministering on earth. But in the case of Daniel and Ezekiel, the title "son of man" emphasized their humanity and mortality.

Ezekiel was facedown in the dust when God spoke to him, reminding him and us of mankind's humble beginning in the dust. God remembers, but we often choose to forget.

Psalm 103:14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

There is a time to fall down in humble adoration, and there is a time to stand up and take orders from the Lord. The important thing was that Ezekiel stood obediently before the Lord and listen to His Word.

2) Go and Speak – v3-5

The word 'prophecy' is largely misunderstood by many Christians due to lack of biblical knowledge from themselves as well as their pastors who didn't teach their congregation properly.

Biblical prophecy is not to scratch the itching ears of the people who want to know what is going to happen in future, although that is a part of the concept of biblical prophecy, rather it is about forth-telling God's Word to the people. Sometimes the contents of the prophecy is a message of judgment, but it is usually followed by a message of hope and forgiveness.

These Jewish people needed to hear Ezekiel's messages because they were rebellious, stiff-necked, and hard-hearted. At least 16 times in this Book you find the Jews described as "rebellious" by the Lord. They had revolted against the Lord and were persistent in their refusal to submit to His will.

3) Do not be afraid – v6-7

Ezekiel was to declare God's Word boldly no matter how his listeners responded. His own people might act like briars and thorns, and even like painful scorpions, but that must not deter His messenger to soften the divine messages. That's including us.

Romans 8:31b If God is for us, who can be against us?

4) Hear the Word and obey – 2:8-3:3

The Lord instructed Ezekiel to take the scroll and eat it and it was sweet like honey in his mouth. It is easy to declare the Word of God to others, but it is hard to live as an example for others to see in the midst of difficult situations. That is why James wrote this in his Book:

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Had Ezekiel heard the description of the hardness of his people before he saw the vision of God's glory, he might have had a difficult time accepting his call. But having seen the glorious throne of the sovereign Lord, Ezekiel knew that he had all the help he needed to obey the will of God.

In his difficult ministry to the Israelites, Moses was encouraged by meeting God on the mountaintop and seeing the display of His glory before the 40 year wilderness journey started; and the Prophet Isaiah saw the glory of Christ in the temple before he launched into his ministry in Isaiah 6; the Prophet Habakkuk was lifted from the valley of despair to the mountain peak of victory by contemplating the glory of God in the history of Israel in Habakkuk 3. Before Stephen laid down his life for the sake of Jesus Christ, he saw the Son of God in heaven in Acts 7. The only motivation that never fails is doing all for the glory of God.

C. DECLARING THE WORD OF GOD TO UNRESPONSIVE PEOPLE

Ezekiel 3:7-11 But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. 8 Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. 9 Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house." 10 Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. 11 And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse."

What the people needed more than anything else was to hear the Word of the Lord. Even before the nation fell, Jeremiah had warned them not to listen to the false prophets, but neither the leaders nor the common people would obey. God had spoken loudly in Israel's shameful defeat and captivity, but now the Jews were still clinging to empty hopes and listening to the lying words of false prophets in Babylon.

The human heart would rather hear lies that bring comfort than truths that bring conviction and cleansing. Ezekiel declared God's Word as a messenger, a sufferer, a watchman, and a sign. But it seems that what he said fell on deaf ears.

I feel for Ezekiel. During many of the Sunday morning services, I often wonder if I was talking to the brick wall. Because I see many people's faces that have no emotion whatsoever. Maybe they practice those poker faces from Desert Diamond Casino.

As the messenger of God Ezekiel had the responsibility to declare the Word of the Lord. After doing that, his job would be done. After my sermon, my job is done. It is up to the individual who heard my message to respond to the Lord with obedience or they can refuse and face the consequences.

Some people choose not to make any changes in their lives even after God speaks to them through pastors and Bible teachers. Either they purposely ignore God's commands or they think that those commands from the Lord only apply to others, not themselves. They refuse to obey the Lord just like these rebellious Jews.

D. EZEKIEL: A WATCHMAN TO ISRAEL

Ezekiel 3:16-21 Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: 18 When I say to the wicked, ' You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. 20 Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 21 Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

Ezekiel's basic prophetic role was to be a watchman to the house of Israel. A watchman in OT times stood on the wall of the city as a sentry, watching for any threat to the city from without or within. If he saw an invading army on the horizon, or dangers within the city like fire or riots, the watchman would immediately sound the alarm to warn the people.

Ezekiel was to listen to the Lord and then warn the people of Judah concerning the judgment on the horizon. His warning was based on the Mosaic covenant, which showed those in a relationship with the Lord how to live life in the best way.

As much as the Jewish people during the time of Ezekiel did not have an excuse for the wrath of God upon them, the American people do not have an excuse for the current and upcoming wrath of God on them. The watchmen in America told them and they ignored them. The judgment is at hand.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We must not forget the main point of all the biblical prophecies: the glory of God.
- 2) As the messengers of God, we must declare His truth and live by His truth.
- 3) When we hear the message of God, we have a choice to obey and be blessed by Him or disobey and face the consequences.