

THE MISSION ASSIGNED TO EZEKIEL: PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD EZEKIEL 03:16–21

Introduction

What is the most important mission or task, on earth? Is it serving as the leader of the most powerful nation? Or being responsible for the most powerful army in the world? Or overseeing the strongest economy? Or producing some of the basic necessities of life? Or discovering the cure for the diseases that plague the world? There are so many tasks that are absolutely essential for the survival of the human race that perhaps it is impossible to pinpoint the most important mission.

Surely one of the most important tasks God ever gave someone was the mission He assigned to the prophet Ezekiel. God chose this prophet to share His Word with a world of unbelievers who were dooming themselves to eternal judgment because of their wicked behaviour. This Scripture is the LORD's official commission of Ezekiel to be His prophet. Here, He assigns Ezekiel seven specific tasks. This is, *The Mission Assigned to the Prophet of God: A Sevenfold Task*, Ezekiel 2:1-3:27.

- I. He must know that he is a "son of man": human, weak, frail (v. 2:1).
- II. He must arise and listen to God (v. 2:1).
- III. He must receive and be filled (empowered) with God's Spirit (v. 2:2).
- IV. He must go and share God's Word (vv. 2:3-5).
- V. He must not fear opposition: emphasized three times (vv. 2:6-7).
- VI. He must devour and digest God's Word (vv. 2:8-3:3)
- VII. He must proclaim God's Word (vv. 3:4-27).

Ezekiel 03:16–21 Proclaim God's Word as His Faithful Watchman

The prophet of God was to proclaim God's Word to the world. God called Ezekiel to minister not only to the captives in Babylon, but also to the Jews who had been scattered all over the world by their conquerors. Although it is not mentioned in this particular passage, he was also being sent to all the nations of the world (see Ezk 25:1-32:32).

Thought 1. Believers are to devour and digest God's Word. We are to study, meditate upon, learn and live out the Word of God day by day. God's Word is to govern our behaviour and even our thoughts. We must learn God's commandments and keep them by living righteously and being a strong testimony for the LORD. Listen to what God says about hungering for and feeding upon His Word:

Throughout this passage God has been warning Ezekiel to expect opposition and persecution. The LORD knew that this would cause Ezekiel to shrink back from his calling, so He gave the future prophet great assurance (vv. 12-14a). Remember that

Ezekiel had been seeking the LORD somewhere along the bank of the river Kedar when the LORD confronted him, called him, and gave him the wonderful vision of God's glory. Then the LORD's Spirit suddenly transported Ezekiel back to the Jewish settlement at Tel Aviv on the Kedar. As he was being transported, he heard a great thunderous voice behind him shouting a song of praise to God. He also heard the wings of the living beings brushing against each other and the rumbling sound of the wheels. Despite these confirmations of God's glory and power, Ezekiel was not enthusiastic about answering God's call (v. 14). The prospect of overwhelming opposition doubtless weighed so heavily upon him that he felt totally inadequate. Discouragement, distress, anguish and turmoil gripped his heart. His soul was in so much turmoil that he became bitter about being called to such a difficult ministry. How could he possibly spend the rest of his life facing such opposition? Why would the LORD call him to emphasize the sins of the people and the coming judgment when He already knew that they were not going to repent?

After the Spirit of God returned him to the settlement at Tel Aviv, Ezekiel continued to struggle with God's call upon his life. He had great difficulty surrendering to a ministry that would never be considered successful in the eyes of people. Such a call from God just overwhelmed his soul. But note where the LORD had taken Ezekiel: back to the settlement, where he would be brushing shoulders with the Jewish captives while making his decision. Seven days in their presence would show him that they were in the grip of sin and without hope of ever being set free from their captivity. He would begin to see how desperately they needed to be saved from sin and from the misery and hopelessness of their captivity. Ezekiel knew that only the LORD could save and deliver His people. Realizing the people's desperate need and the burdens of their souls, Ezekiel would begin to be burdened for them. He would see the consequences of their wicked behaviour: the guilt, sorrow, misery, anger, hostility, broken relationships and all the other consequences that afflict the wicked of the earth. Feeling their suffering and pain, Ezekiel would more readily surrender to God's call.

The prophet Ezekiel was to proclaim God's Word as His *faithful watchman*. Even after seeing the desperate needs of the people, Ezekiel was still not ready to surrender to the LORD. This seems to be indicated by the fact that the LORD Himself spoke to Ezekiel at the end of the seven days to give him another opportunity to accept His call. God's call was not an invitation to serve Him; it was an appointment. God's call is never an invitation that can be rejected. It is a duty, an obligation, a responsibility the LORD assigns a person. In no uncertain terms, the LORD told Ezekiel that he was to be God's watchman to the house of Israel (vv. 16-21). In ancient history a watchman stood on the walls of the city to warn the citizens of approaching enemies or dangers in the city like fires or civil disturbance. If he observed any danger, the watchman immediately sounded an alarm to warn the citizens¹ (2 Sam 18:24-27; 2 Kng 9:17-20; Isa 21:6; 52:8; 62:6; Jer 6:17; Hab 2:1).

Now Ezekiel had to warn the people that judgment was coming. They must either repent or face God's wrath. The duty of God's prophet was — and still is — to warn both the wicked and righteous of God's coming judgment. The wicked must be warned to repent of their sinful ways in order to save their lives, and the righteous must be warned against turning away from the LORD and committing evil. The primary duty of a prophet of God is to proclaim the salvation of God, not to predict the future. The true prophet of God must warn people about the coming judgment. Some prophets are faithful in warning people, and other prophets are unfaithful. God gave Ezekiel four examples to show the contrast between faithful and unfaithful watchmen.

- a. There are watchmen who fail to warn the wicked (v. 18). Sadly, the wicked will die because of their sinful ways. When they choose to reject God, His Word and the life of righteousness that He demands, the wicked stand guilty before God and must face His judgment.

As for unfaithful prophets, they will be held accountable for the death of the wicked. The blood of the wicked will be on their hands. Note that it is the LORD Himself who will hold the watchmen (prophets) accountable. The LORD will accept no excuse, for the prophets have either been complacent, careless or unconcerned or they have not truly believed God's Word about the coming judgment. Therefore, unfaithful prophets will suffer the consequences. They will give an account for their failed ministry. They will stand before God guilty of the most heinous (horrifying, monstrous) crime, that of failing to warn the wicked of the coming judgment. Who knows how many of the wicked would have repented and turned to God if they had just been warned?

- b. There are watchmen who faithfully warn the wicked of God's coming judgment (v. 19). Once the wicked have been warned, they will die in their sins if they refuse to repent by turning from their evil ways. As for the faithful prophets, their lives will be saved from the coming judgment because they have fulfilled their duty and proclaimed the warnings of God's Word.
- c. There are watchmen who fail to warn the righteous against turning away and committing evil (v. 20). Note exactly what this verse says. No matter what people may profess, evildoers will die. Even if people profess to be righteous and from all outward appearance seem to be righteous, they will die if they turn away from righteous behaviour and do evil.

When we read a passage like this, one that seems to contradict the eternal security of the believer, we must always keep in mind one fact. In the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, *truly righteous* people believe God. They have faith in God and trust His Word and promises. Therefore they seek to keep God's commandments and live righteously. Of course, *true believers* never reach a point where they never sin. But when they do sin, they seek the LORD for forgiveness. In the Old Testament, true believers sought forgiveness through prayer and the offering of the substitute sacrifice

(a symbol of Christ). The point is that true believers never continue on and on in sin, but rather repent and turn back to God. They turn back because they believe in the LORD and in the promises and warnings of His Word.

Now note the “righteous” person in this passage. He sins and continues to sin, refusing to repent. His righteousness is only outward, not inward. It is not the righteousness of *true belief* in God. True belief, trust, faith in God — this is what makes a person acceptable to God in both the Old and New Testaments. As Scripture says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6). In the present passage, the so-called righteous person does not believe in God and His Word enough to repent and live righteously. But God loves him as He does every human being. God deals with people like this by putting a stumbling block (some trial) in their path at some point, hoping to arouse them to see their need for believing Him and His Word. If the stumbling block does not shake such people enough to truly believe and obey God by living righteously, they will die. They have chosen to live without God and to be separated from Him. Therefore, they will bear God's judgment in both this life and the next. These *seemingly* righteous people have...

- become high-minded and failed to continue in the fear of God (Rom 11:20)
- failed to pay close attention to God's Word and drifted away (Heb 2:1 -3)
- refused to continue growing in the knowledge of God and therefore fallen away (Heb 6:4-8)
- refused to repent and continued to deliberately sin despite knowing the truth (Heb 10:26-39)
- continued to reject the LORD and His warnings and consequently become more and more hard-hearted (Heb 12:25-29)
- continued to commit sins that lead to death (see note, 1 John 5:16)
- continued to sin so much that they will never repent (see note, 1 Cor 11:27-30)

As for the watchmen or prophets who fails to warn the righteous, God will hold them accountable. The blood of these *seemingly* righteous people will be upon the hands of the watchmen. Unfaithful prophets will give an account for their refusal to do what God says in His Holy Word. They will give an account for their unbelief, carelessness, slothfulness, complacency and disobedience.

- d. There are watchmen who warn the righteous not to sin (v. 21). The *truly righteous* believe God, so they listen to God's Word and do exactly what He says. They seek to live righteously as they walk day by day. When they do sin, they repent and seek the LORD's forgiveness and begin to walk righteously once again. Because they believe and obey God by keeping His Holy Word and commandments, they will live an abundant life both now and eternally. As for faithful prophets, they will be saved and delivered from the coming judgment.

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

Luke 9:2 *And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*

Luke 9:60 *Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

Acts 5:20 *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”*

2 Tim 2:2 *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. ■*