

DUTY OF THE WATCHMAN OF GOD: WARN THE PEOPLE OF GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT EZEKIEL 33:01–09

Introduction

The *Intelligence Agency* of a nation is of critical importance in protecting its people. Whether a satellite or a plane in the sky, a mechanical or human spy or a soldier or guard on the border, a nation's ability to gain intelligence determines its capability to protect itself. In ancient history a nation protected itself by establishing fortified cities and outposts along its borders as well as by posting military patrols at key locations throughout the land. But most important of all were the watchmen who were strategically posted along the walls of a city. It was the watchman's duty to scan the horizon for any approaching enemy and to be alert to any danger within the city, such as fire or civil disturbance. If either danger was observed, the watchman was to immediately sound an alarm to warn the citizens (2 Sam 18:24-27; 2 Kng 9:17-20; Isa 21:6; 52:8; 62:6; Jer 6:17; Hab 2:1).

Scripture repeatedly says that the minister of God is the watchman of God. When God called Ezekiel, He called him to be His watchman (3:16-21). Now that Ezekiel was about to begin a new series of messages, God reminded the prophet that he was His watchman. Although Ezekiel's messages were to focus primarily on the LORD's promise of a glorious future for His people, he had to continue to warn the people of the danger of failing to follow the LORD and live righteously.

Remember that Ezekiel was preaching primarily to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Other Jewish exiles had been scattered throughout the nations of the world, making it almost impossible for them to maintain their identity as a people. The future looked bleak for the Jews as a nation. Obviously, the exiles were discouraged. They felt hopeless and desperately needed to hear words of encouragement. While the prophet was to deliver this message to encourage them, he had to guard against telling them only what they wanted to hear. He was to preach the whole counsel of God, which meant that he had to remind the Jews that God is as just and holy as He is loving and compassionate. Ezekiel was not to neglect God's demand for righteousness and the consequences of sin, which is judgment.

The duty of a watchman is to preach both the love and justice of God, both the glorious future promised believers and the terrifying judgment that will fall upon unbelievers. This series of messages emphasizes the LORD's promise of a glorious future, but it also includes a warning to all who continue to live wickedly. This is, *The Watchman of God and His Duties in the New Age: A Picture of God Sending Forth Ministers to Serve His People*, Ezekiel 33:1-33.

- I. The watchman must warn the people of God's coming judgment (vv. 1-9).
- II. The watchman must appeal to the people to repent (vv. 10-20).
- III. The watchman must explain the causes of judgment and the consequences of sin (vv. 21-33).

Ezekiel 33:01–09 The Watchman Must Warn the People of God's Coming Judgment

The watchman of God must warn people of His coming judgment. As with any profession, there were responsible and irresponsible watchmen in the ancient world. A responsible watchman was alert and observant. He kept his eyes focused on the horizon as he looked for signs of danger. The citizens of a city needed as much warning as possible in order to prepare to defend themselves, so it was absolutely essential for the watchman to be wide awake and vigilant. The people's very survival depended upon the watchman being responsible.

However, once the faithful watchman blew the trumpet of warning, he had fulfilled his responsibility. Then it was the people's responsibility to heed the warning (vv. 2-5). Those who ignored the warning would die (v. 4). And their death would be their own fault. Tragically, if they had heeded the warning, they would have lived. For the people to be saved, it was not enough to have a responsible, faithful watchman. The people themselves were responsible for responding to the warning. If they responded, they saved themselves. But if they ignored the warning, they doomed themselves. Their blood was upon their own hands.

If the watchman was irresponsible and failed to warn the people of an approaching danger, two things would happen (v. 6). First, the people would die because of the watchman's unfaithful, irresponsible behaviour. Second, God would hold the watchman responsible for their deaths. Note exactly what Scripture says: if a single person died because the watchman failed to warn the people, God would hold the watchman accountable for that person's death.

The LORD now applied the lesson of the watchman's responsibility to Ezekiel (vv. 7-9). God reminded the prophet that He had chosen him to be His watchman. Years earlier when the LORD had called Ezekiel to be His prophet, He had given him a sevenfold task. One of those tasks was to proclaim God's Word as His faithful watchman (3:16-21). Now the LORD reminded him of the awesome responsibility that rested on his shoulders.

This reminder was essential, for the exiles were heartbroken over their situation and in desperate need of encouragement. But Ezekiel was still God's watchman, and he had to keep God's call close to his heart. He had to continue to be responsible and faithful, not only by encouraging the people, but also by warning them of God's coming judgment. If Ezekiel failed to warn the wicked, God would hold him accountable for their death (v. 8). However, the LORD also promised Ezekiel that if he warned the wicked to repent of their sins and they refused, the prophet would deliver his own soul (v. 9).

Acts 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

1 Th 5:14 *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

Heb 13:7 *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*

1 Pet 5:2 *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.*

Isa. 58:1 *"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins."*

Isa 62:6 *I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest..*

Jer 3:15 *Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.*

Jer 6:17 *I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.'*

Ezek 3:17 *"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me."*

Ezek 3:18 *When I say to a wicked person, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ■*