

Ezekiel: The Difficult Challenge

INTRODUCTION.

- A. During the history of God's people, He often sent prophets to direct His people. Among some of the prophets that we have studied have been Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, etc.
- B. Many of the prophets warned the people of the coming judgment of God. The northern nation of Israel fell without turning back to God. The southern nation of Israel took longer, but they likewise fell.
- C. Eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem, around 597 B.C., during the reign of king Jehoiachin (the grandson of king Josiah, a righteous king) Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon besieged the city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar carried away all but the poorest. (II Kings 24:8-20)
- D. The story of Ezekiel picks up five years after the captivity of Jehoiachin.

I. WHO WAS EZEKIEL?

- A. Ezekiel was a member of the priestly family of Buzi. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel. (Ezekiel 14:14; 28:3)
- B. Ezekiel was probably taken captive in the captivity of Jehoiachin, 11 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. (II Kings 24:14-16)
- C. Ezekiel was carried into captivity sometime around 597 B.C. He began his prophecying in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, around 593 B.C. (Ezekiel 1:2)
- D. From passages in the book of Ezekiel, we learn that Ezekiel was married and had a home in the land of captivity. He lost his wife in an unforeseen stroke in the ninth year of his exile. (Ezekiel 8:1; 24:18)

II. CONSIDER EZEKIEL'S BURDEN.

- A. Ezekiel's burden was a challenge. While he was writing to his fellow brethren in exile, he was given visions of Jerusalem's final destruction.
 - 1. Chapters 1-24 prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - 2. Chapters 25-32 contains the calling of God's judgment upon Israel's enemies.
 - 3. Chapters 33-48 contained the promise to restore Israel to their land and the coming of the kingdom of Christ and spiritual Israel.

- B. In Ezekiel chapters 1-3, God warned Ezekiel what his work would involve.
1. The hand of the Lord came upon Ezekiel allowing him to see an elaborate vision. (1:3-28)
 2. The Lord spoke to Ezekiel. He told Ezekiel that He was sending Ezekiel to a rebellious nation. He was to say to the nation of Israel, “Thus says the Lord God.” (1:28 - 2:5)
 3. In addition to facing a rebellious people, Ezekiel would also face briers, thorns, and scorpions. (2:6-8)
 4. The Lord gave Ezekiel a message of lamentations, mourning, and woe. The Lord told Ezekiel to take this message to the impudent and hard-hearted house of Israel. (3:1-9)
 - a. The Lord warned Ezekiel that Israel would not learn.
 - b. The Lord promised to make Ezekiel’s “face strong against their faces.” Ezekiel was told not to be afraid or dismayed.
 5. The Lord informed Ezekiel that He had made Ezekiel watchman for the house of Israel. (3:16-21)
 - a. If Ezekiel warned Israel and they did not change, then they would be innocent.
 - b. If Ezekiel failed to warn Israel, then their blood would be required at Ezekiel’s hands.
 6. Again, the Lord warned Ezekiel of the challenges and rejection he would face. (3:22-27)
- C. Regarding the end of Ezekiel’s life, we know very little. Smith’s Bible Dictionary reads as follows, “He lived in the highest consideration among his companions in exile, and their elders consulted him on all occasions. He is said to have been murdered in Babylon and to have been buried on the banks of the Euphrates.” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary)

III. HOW WOULD WE HAVE HANDLED THE BURDEN OF EZEKIEL?

- A. Ezekiel preached to those in physical captivity. (Ezekiel 3:11) We are to be preaching to those in spiritual captivity.
1. We are to go and make disciples of all that we can teach. (Matthew 28:18-20) This can only be accomplished by teaching the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:16)
 2. We are to plant and water just as Paul and Apollos did. (I Corinthians 3:5-8)

3. By so doing, we are showing the spiritually captive the perfect law of liberty in hopes that they will look in and be free. (James 1:25)
- B. Ezekiel preached to a rebellious group. (Ezekiel 2:3) In a similar manner, not every person we teach will hear and obey.
 1. Not everyone received the teachings of Jesus. (Ex. John 6:66)
 2. Not everyone received the teachings of the apostles. (Ex. Acts 17:1-5a)
 3. Jesus taught that not every seed that is planted will bring forth a fruit bearing plant. A lot depends upon the “ground” in which the seed is planted. (Matthew 13:18-23) Also, take notice of the following statements showing that not everyone who is taught will obey:
 - a. *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* (Matthew 7:13,14, NKJV)
 - b. *“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 7:21, NKJV) This shows that there will be some who will hear but not do the will of the Father in Heaven.
- C. The Lord told Ezekiel not to be fearful. (Ezekiel 2:6) Followers of Jesus Christ are told the same thing. *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* (Matthew 10:28, NKJV)
- D. The Lord told Ezekiel to “receive into your heart all My words that I speak . . .” (Ezekiel 3:10, NKJV) If we are going to live godly lives and teach the lost, then we, too, must receive God’s Word into our hearts. (Proverbs 3:3-6)
- E. A lesson on Ezekiel would not be complete without discussing Ezekiel 3:16-19. Ezekiel was the watchman over Israel. He was to warn them of their wickedness. While a parallel of this can be applied to personal evangelism, a stronger parallel can be seen in you warning a brother against sin. Ezekiel warned his brethren, and so to should we. (Galatians 6:1-4; James 5:19-20)

CONCLUSION.

- A. As with every Bible character, there are many lessons to learn. These are just a few lessons from the life of Ezekiel, a man who faced a difficult challenge.
- B. Let us walk like Ezekiel and face our challenges without fear and dismay. Let us take the life giving message to the lost and turn erring Christians back to the strait and narrow.

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