

EZEKIEL: THE PROPHET AS AN EXAMPLE

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Lessons: Ezekiel 4, 12 and 24

We have learned how prophets in olden time were watchmen appointed by the Lord to guard His people, to give them warning of the approach of evil spirits, even as watchmen on the walls of a city gave warning of some enemy drawing near, and gave opportunity for them to close the gates and place soldiers in readiness to fight.

There were several different ways in which prophets gave such a warning. Sometimes they would go out into the streets of a city and cry at the top of their voices, as did the Prophet Jonah in Nineveh: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Such was the punishment which was to come upon them for their wickedness. But in this case they repented and sought the Lord, and turned back the evil from them so that the city was not overthrown. Again they would write down visions, dreams and prophecies on a scroll, and cause it to be read either in the Temple or in some public place. This you remember Jeremiah did, and when his scroll was read before the king he cut it in pieces with a knife and threw it into the fire. Still another way in which prophets gave warning was by giving an answer from the Lord when some one inquired of them as Elijah did to Ahab, and as Samuel did to Saul. Or possibly by causing some wonderful thing to happen as a sign that the Lord was with them they were able to cause the people to listen to their warning. A most notable instance of this was in the case of Elijah when he caused fire to come down from heaven and devour the sacrifice upon the altar, while the four hundred prophets of Baal tried in vain to get their God to send fire from heaven.

But there was one way of giving warning of which you possibly have not heard very much, and of this I want to speak especially today. It was a way that was used a great deal by Ezekiel, the Prophet raised up to bring the Word of the Lord to the captives by the River Chebar. It was used especially in the last days of Israel when the people were so wicked they would not listen to anything the prophet said, would not read his scroll, would not come to him to inquire of the Lord. It became necessary then for him to attract their attention and make them listen. This he did by doing some very strange thing in a public place where all those who passed by would see it, and would wonder why he should do it. And then he would show them that the strange thing was a sign for the Lord warning them against some evil to come.

On one occasion Ezekiel took a tile, which was a flat stone used in building, and he drew on it the picture of a city. Then he stood it up in a public place

where all might see, and as if he were making a representation in a sand table he made little earthworks around it, and built a camp around it as if there were a besieging army. And he made little battering rams and set them up as if they were knocking down the walls of the city. When people stopped and looked and asked him what he was doing he told them that this was a picture of what would happen very soon to the City of Jerusalem unless they turned from their evil ways.

On another occasion Ezekiel took all his furniture out of his house, packed up all his goods as if he were preparing for a long journey, and he piled all his goods in the street near the wall of the city. Then he got a shovel and dug a hole under the wall, and when evening was come and many people were standing around wondering what he was doing, he carried his furniture out of the city, crawling through the hole he had made. When they asked him to tell them what it meant he said that even thus would the Children of Israel seek to escape secretly, but they would be caught and carried away into captivity unless they repented and turned again to the worship of the Lord.

This kind of sign was called “bearing the iniquities of the people, “ and often in doing this a prophet had to suffer hard things. For instance, the Lord caused Ezekiel’s wife, whom he loved very dearly, to become sick, and after a time when all the people knew that she was sick He caused her to die, and took her up into heaven. Ezekiel was very sad indeed because his love for her had been very great. But the Lord told him that he should appear gay and merry, and give no sign of his grief; and when his friends asked him why he was not sorry for his wife’s death he should say that all the things they loved the most were about to be taken away from them, and they would not even be able to show their sorrow, but would be made to serve cheerfully a conquering nation in a strange land.

In this sense the Lord also was a Prophet. He bore the iniquities of the people. He allowed them to arrest Him, to try Him, and to crucify Him, all as a sign of how cruelly they had been treating Him by not keeping His Word or obeying His Law. And of this we shall speak particularly next Sunday. The story of what they did to Him stands in the Word as a warning to us, that we may not turn away from the Lord and hate Him, and crucify Him in our own hearts.