

EZEKIEL 3

THE SPIRITUAL WATCHMAN

At the close of the last chapter, a prophetic scroll was delivered into the hands of Ezekiel; and it was filled with dark forebodings of tribulation and sorrow. And since he was being appointed as God's representative to His rebellious children, he was directed to eat the scroll – thereby receiving its contents into himself. Thus the Lord's words would infuse themselves, so to speak, into his very being; and his soul would be permeated with a feeling of their reality and importance. These words were "sweet as honey in his mouth"; and yet they afterwards caused him to go "in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit." They were bitter indeed, because he was called to announce a message and carry out a work which was to be peculiarly painful and difficult; but they were sweet notwithstanding, because it was the Lord's service in which he was to be engaged – and it was a service which also had the full consent and approval of his own mind. And now, as a true reformer and faithful ambassador of heaven, Ezekiel was to henceforth count God's glory as his own highest good; and he was to make all things in his life subordinate to the one grand purpose of joyfully fulfilling the ministry which he had received from above. And most nobly did this man of God execute his high commission! As more and more evil prevailed against him, he raised himself – in the Lord's name – to a more determined and strenuous resistance against it! In such a spiritual hero, we recognize a picture of the forever-enduring strength and perpetual growth of the cause of Christ; for, like its Divine Author, it carries in its bosom the element of eternity. If the Lord's work appears to be languishing, let us never doubt that it shall rise again into prosperity!

Beginning in verse 15, we have a record of the entrance of Ezekiel upon his spiritual vocation, after the conclusion of the glorious vision that he received by the river of Chebar (chapters 1:1-3:14). Here we read the first communication that the Lord made with him after that vision. He had gone to Tel-abib, which is not mentioned anywhere else; but it was doubtless the central position, or chief town, of the Jewish colony of exiles in Babylon. The prophet tells us that he came to his fellow-captives there, and he sat down there among them for seven days in a state of lonely and silent grief. This was to give a proof of his deep fellow-feeling with his exiled brethren, in their depressed condition; and it was to show them how entirely he entered into their sorrowful state. Thus, by the tenderness of his sympathizing spirit, he endeavored to win their confidence, and to secure a favorable ear to the words of mercy and of judgment which he would soon be called to deliver in their hearing.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Ezekiel eats the scroll that was presented to him, and he is further prepared for his responsibilities as the Lord's prophet – verses 1-14
- ❖ His office is further explained, under the picture of a watchman – verses 15-21
- ❖ His speech is restrained and restored, as the Lord pleased – verses 22-27

At the end of those seven days, a word came to Ezekiel from the Lord. It was chiefly intended to present a striking view of the office to which he was called – as one who was appointed, on God’s behalf, to deal with the souls of men. It was also meant to charge upon him the full responsibility which rested upon his head. “Son of man,” said the Lord, “I have set thee a watchman to the house of Israel; and thou dost hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me...” It is only in Ezekiel that we find a prophet formally receiving such an appointment as this, and being set by God as a spiritual watchman to give timely warning to his people of the danger that was about to fall upon them. He was ordained by God to open their eyes to the profound evils that surrounded them; he was to break the spell of ingrained and cherished delusions, and raise the cry of danger when no danger was suspected.

Would the people’s portion be one of life and blessing, or of death and cursing? Here we see that the answer to this great question hung upon another question – namely, whether they would make righteousness or sin their choice. Their return to righteousness would be the indispensable condition of their restoration to blessedness. However, if they persevered in their own evil ways, only the visitation of Divine wrath could be expected. While this charge cut off all hope from a backsliding and impenitent people; it also held out ample encouragement to those who remained steadfast in the Covenant of God, and repented of their evil ways!

At the very outset, therefore, the prophet endeavored to urge his people to settle the controversy between themselves and the Lord. Individually and collectively, they had to come to be right with God. This was the grand turning point, upon which hung the destiny that awaited them.

Immediately after Ezekiel had received this charge, the Lord ordered him to go forth into the plain, so that He might talk with him there alone (verse 22). And when he got there, he was favored again with another manifestation of that Divine glory which he had seen by the river of Chebar. The Holy Spirit then directed him to go and shut himself up in his house. This was to cause him to understand that in the work he had to do, he must look for no sympathy or support from man; but rather, he must be alone with his God – reverently hearing His Word, and receiving strength from His hand. The people’s obstinate and wayward disposition would be felt upon the prophet’s spirit like restraining fetters, and so he would need to look for his encouragement elsewhere than in fellowship with them. Their conduct would be like restricting bonds, which would dampen and depress his soul. Nevertheless, the work which he was called to do would not be done in vain; nor was the cause absolutely hopeless. It was the Lord’s words that were to be spoken, and they could never be spoken in vain!

Lord, we pray that You would cause Your Gospel-ministers to be faithful to their charge as the spiritual watchman of Your people. Amen.

