

Ezekiel 3:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

Analysis

God appoints Ezekiel as 'watchman unto the house of Israel' (tsopheh, צֹפֵה), a military metaphor describing a sentinel posted on city walls to warn of approaching danger. This watchman role appears throughout Ezekiel (3:17, 33:7) and other prophets (Isaiah 21:11-12, Jeremiah 6:17, Hosea 9:8). The watchman's responsibility is to relay the warning faithfully—if he sees danger and remains silent, blood guilt falls on him; if he warns and people ignore him, they bear their own guilt. This establishes the prophet's accountability: Ezekiel must proclaim God's word whether people listen or refuse. Success isn't measured by results but by faithfulness to the commission. This principle applies to all who communicate God's truth—pastors, teachers, parents, evangelists. We're responsible for faithful proclamation, not for forcing response. God holds people accountable for their response to His word once properly delivered.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cities employed watchmen on walls and towers to spot approaching armies, raiders, or messengers. The watchman's cry could mean life or death for the city. Jerusalem's walls featured multiple towers for surveillance (2 Chronicles 26:9). A watchman who slept on duty or failed to sound alarm faced execution. Ezekiel's audience understood this imagery viscerally—watchmen were essential to survival. By using this metaphor, God emphasized the life-and-death urgency of prophetic ministry. Ezekiel must warn of spiritual danger with the same

urgency a watchman warns of military threat. The exiles needed to understand that ignoring God's warnings through His prophets had led to their current judgment.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the watchman imagery challenge your understanding of Christian witness and warning others about sin's consequences?
2. In what relationships or contexts is God calling you to be a faithful 'watchman' who speaks difficult truths?

Interlinear Text

בֶּן	אָדָם	צֶפֶה	נָתַתִּי יָךְ	לְבֵית	יִשְׂרָאֵל
Son	of man	thee a watchman	I have made	unto the house	of Israel
H1121	H120	H6822	H5414	H1004	H3478
וְשָׁמְעֶה	מִפִּי	דְּבַר	וְהִזְהַרְתָּ	אוֹתָם	מִמֶּנִּי
therefore hear	at my mouth	the word	and give them warning		
H8085	H6310	H1697	H2094	H853	H4480

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 62:6 (Parallel theme): I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence,

Isaiah 52:8 (Parallel theme): Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

Hebrews 13:17 (Parallel theme): Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Colossians 1:28 (Parallel theme): Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

Jeremiah 6:17 (Parallel theme): Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

2 Chronicles 19:10 (Word): And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass.

Isaiah 56:10 (Parallel theme): His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

Isaiah 58:1 (Parallel theme): Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

1 Corinthians 12:28 (Parallel theme): And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

2 Corinthians 5:20 (Parallel theme): Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.