

Why an End-Time Warning?

The Bible states with absolute clarity that God's servants will proclaim an Ezekiel warning during the last days and that a gospel will be preached as a witness until the return of Jesus Christ. That gospel is an appeal by God Almighty to a world held captive by sin. Through it God implores man to turn from evil and obey his Creator.

But why does God want this message preached? Why a warning? And why at a time when mankind will have fixed his will in defiance to God? Why would God want an Ezekiel warning preached when, by all indications, no one will heed it? God's word answers these questions, and in doing so, reveals something extraordinary about God and His attitude regarding the last days. In truth, God's word is very specific concerning why it is so important to Him that an Ezekiel warning is preached at the very end. This reason is revealed in the words of two prophets.

A Lesson from Two Prophets

God's approach toward proclaiming a warning is graphically illustrated throughout the scriptures. However, two minor prophets reveal an aspect of God's character that demands He proclaim a warning prior to the execution of His judgment. The first of these prophets is Jonah.

The story of Jonah is famous in the scriptures. It has been told countless times to millions of children. But the book of Jonah is more than a child's tale. It stands as a great declaration of God's power and His virtue.

Jonah was a prophet of Israel who was commissioned by God to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach a warning. That warning called for the people of Nineveh to turn from evil or suffer the consequences. God indicated that this gentile people had 40 days to repent or He would bring destruction upon them (Jonah 3:4).

At this point it is important to understand something about this city. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the mortal enemy of Israel. It's hard to imagine that Jonah could have wanted to do anything less than warn them about their impending destruction. But this is exactly what God directed him to do. According to the scriptures, once Jonah received God's word regarding Nineveh, he tried to run away in an attempt to avoid proclaiming this warning (Jon. 1:2). However, God intervened (Jon. 1:4-2:10), and Jonah reluctantly went and spoke God's words.

As a result of this warning, Nineveh repented, and by order of the king, all its citizens fasted and appealed to God for His forgiveness (Jon.3:5-9). God was so moved by this change of heart that He withheld His judgment: Nineveh was spared.

Regrettably, this act of mercy infuriated Jonah. The scriptures reveal that Jonah voiced his complaint directly to God. Essentially what Jonah said was that he knew God would exercise His mercy on this pagan city and that is why he never wanted to go there in the first place. Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed, not spared. And he was not shy in expressing his frustration at the way God handled the situation. Notice the words Jonah used when advancing his complaint.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. (Jon. 4:1-2)

The word "evil" used by Jonah in this verse comes from the Hebrew word ra. This word has a variety of meanings, but in the context of this verse, it is clear what is intended. Ra is not referring to "sin" or

“wickedness,” but rather to “distress,” “adversity,” or “calamity.” With the words “it repents you of the evil,” Jonah was saying that he knew God did not want to bring calamity upon the citizens of Nineveh, even though they were a people who worshiped false gods.

But what does this event, which took place over twenty five hundred years ago have to do with the preaching of an end-time gospel? The answer: PLENTY! And this answer is revealed in the words of a second prophet.

The prophet Joel wrote of a time that takes place at the very end of man’s reign on earth. It is a time that will see a great army led by Jesus Christ when He returns. At that time He will subdue all the nations. This army and the battle that ensues is described in the second chapter of Joel’s prophecy. Joel introduces this chapter with God’s instruction to “blow the horn in Zion and sound the alarm in my holy mountain” (Joel 2:1). This is clearly speaking of an Ezekiel warning. But there is more.

When describing this event which again will take place at the very end of man’s reign on this earth, God explains why a warning must be proclaimed. He does so by first appealing to mankind to repent and turn to Him. However, God then reveals a profound truth about His attitude concerning the great destruction that will take place. Notice what God says.

And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.
(Joel 2:13)

Here God uses the same words used by Jonah when Jonah criticized Him for sparing Nineveh. However, this time God uses them when describing the great devastation that is going to come upon the earth in the last days. God said it “repents Him of the evil.” In other words, it is God’s desire to not bring calamity upon mankind. This attitude of compassion is what truly defines who God is. God is a God of strength, but His greatest power is revealed in His mercy. This is a point that so few understand.

When speaking to the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said “Go and learn the meaning of the words I will have mercy and not sacrifice”(Mt. 9:13). The point Jesus was making was that mercy is an essential part of God’s character, and He desires greatly to demonstrate that quality.

A Merciful Warning

The importance of mercy and compassion cannot be overstated. Jesus characterized mercy as one the “weightier matters of the law” (Mt. 23:23) and indicated that without this quality man would never enter into God’s kingdom (Mark 11:26). God’s desire is that man repent in order to experience the great blessings He has in store for him. Additionally, it is God’s desire that all mankind would come to that repentance. Notice the words of the apostle Peter.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2Pet. 3:9)

Those who believe the commission to preach the gospel as a warning in the last days is finished do not fully understand what that gospel is. An Ezekiel warning not only announces the great depravity of man, but also the great compassion of God. Those who proclaim this message do so because God wants man to know that He is a forgiving Father who cares greatly for those whom He has made in His own image.

God wants man to turn from sin, and because of this He will continue to make that appeal until the very end. In a very real sense, those who refuse to preach an Ezekiel warning are not unlike Jonah. Their actions deprive God of an opportunity to proclaim His love to His children. And just as He intervened with Jonah, God will intervene again, if necessary, to ensure a warning goes forth. Whether it is through a man, a church, a nation, the heavens, or an angelic being, the great gospel of His kingdom will be proclaimed as a witness “and then shall the end come” (Mt. 24:14).

