

## 554 An adamant harder than flint

As a result of the persistent disobedience of His covenant people Israel, the Lord God had finally sent them into exile in Babylon by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar over an 18-year period (606-588 BC, see II Kings Chapters 24 and 25). The people of Judah finally realised that they had seriously “blown it” as far as the Lord and His covenant were concerned, and here they were, defeated, exiled, and pining for Jerusalem and Zion. This is the context of the mournful Psalm 137, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows ... ‘How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?’” (from Psalm 137 vv.1-4).

The Lord had every right to turn His back on these, His sinful, rebellious people, yet they were still His chosen ones of the covenant. We read in Ezekiel 2.3-4a, “Thus spoke the Lord God to Ezekiel – ‘Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, [even] unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted’” (Ezekiel 2.3-4a, KJV). Ezekiel’s message was to be simple – “Thus saith the LORD God” (v.4b), so that, whatever might be the people’s reaction, they would at least know that “a prophet had been among them” (v.5). Ezekiel was not to be afraid of them or of their words, and not to “be dismayed at their looks”, despite the briars, thorns and scorpions, literal or metaphorical, that he would encounter (v.6). Ezekiel was told to eat “a roll of a book” which contained “lamentations, and mourning, and woe”, which he duly did, tasting it “as honey for sweetness” (from 2.9-3.3).

Ezekiel was not being sent to strangers but to “the house of Israel”, who thus knew very well what, or rather Who, he would be talking about. Even so, the Lord already knew their reaction - they “will not hearken unto thee” (3.7a). So the Lord was equipping Ezekiel in no uncertain terms – “I have made thy face strong against their faces”, and, all set for a classic head butt! - “and thy forehead strong against their foreheads, as an adamant harder than flint” (from vv. 8-9a). Anyone messing with Ezekiel would regret it! Finally the Lord told Ezekiel, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity ... and speak unto them, and tell them, ‘Thus saith the LORD God ...’” (from vv. 10-11a). We note that the Lord’s words to Ezekiel were to involve both his heart – his own deep belief - and his ears – full remembrance.

Ezekiel was then taken up by “the spirit” and sent on his way, amid awesome sounds and sights of the Lord’s glory: “I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me” (vv.12-14). Clearly Ezekiel was none too keen on this mission, but he went anyway, in trust and obedience (in contrast to Jonah for instance, Jonah 1.1-3). When Ezekiel reached “them of the captivity ... I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days” (from v.15). He sat and waited because as yet he had nothing from the Lord for him to say!

Then, action. The Lord had made Ezekiel “a watchman unto the house of Israel”, who was faithfully to warn the people (from v.17). If Ezekiel did not so warn, for the saving of lives, the Lord would require the sinner’s blood at Ezekiel’s hand (vv.18,20). If he did warn however, and his warning was not heeded, Ezekiel would have “delivered his own soul” from responsibility over the fate of his hearers (vv.19,21).

As always when we ponder such events and people in the Old Testament we are richly rewarded, through Christ and by the Holy Spirit, in terms of our own Christian discipleship. For we too, though likely on a more local scale than Ezekiel, are to be prophets and watchmen, “sitting where they sit” among ignorant and rebellious people. We too are well-equipped with “the words of the Lord”, now in all their fulness in Christ: the eternal consequences of undealt-with sin; the central significance of Jesus Christ; the extraordinary Gospel of grace; the calling to receive Christ as Lord of our lives, and thereby also to receive redemption, forgiveness and life eternal from God the Father.

May the prophet-type promises for all in Christ, and the watchmen-type warnings for those not yet in Christ, remain on our lips whenever appropriate. No matter what the response to such words may be, by God’s grace those metaphorical foreheads, each one “as an adamant harder than flint”, will stand us in good stead! Throughout, we know that – “Faithful [is] he that calleth you ...”, and that our Ezekiel-type labours will never be “in vain in the Lord” (I Thessalonians 5.24a / I Corinthians 15.57end.)

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