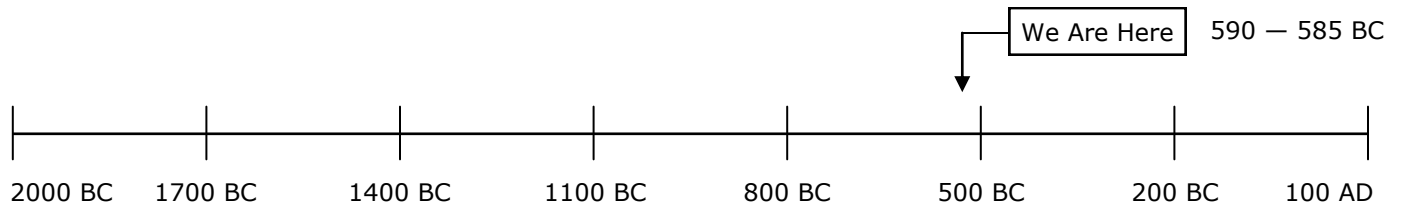


A Watchman for the People

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Week 35: Aug. 27 — Sept. 2 — *Lamentations; Obadiah; Various* 66.8% Complete — 120 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Overview of Bible History (p.37)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

We have read for several weeks now the terrible judgment that God released upon Judah, a judgment that was well deserved, but a judgment that left both the Jews and the surrounding nations in awe. Jerusalem, the magnificent city that bore the names of God and His great kings David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah, was leveled. Everything was burned to the ground (586), including the Temple; furthermore, all was pillaged, taken to Nebuchadnezzar's capital city. The prophet Jeremiah, who was an eye-witness to this destruction, described the devastation for us in the book of *Lamentations* (2:1-22; 4:1-22). After the Babylonians deported their third group of captives, they appointed a governor named Gedaliah to oversee the province of Judah. However, it wasn't very long and the Jews conspired to assassinate the new governor. Knowing full well that this action would incite the Babylonians to return, the remaining Jews fled to Egypt (*Jer. 40, 41*). However, God warned the people that if they hid in Egypt, He would find them there and destroy them (*Jer. 43; Ezek. 32:1-16*). His words were true; Nebuchadnezzar found them, killed them, and annihilated the land of Egypt.

- Prophetic Passages

1. **Dry Bones** (*Ezek. 36:8-11, 22-24, 33-36; 37:1-14; 39:2-29*): Perhaps the most unique depiction of the promised return of the Jews was the vision Ezekiel had of the Valley of Dry Bones (*37:1-14*). God would indeed fulfill His vow and bring His people back home.
2. **Good Shepherd** (*Ezek. 34:11-24*): A foreshadowing of Christ's arrival and reign in the Millennial Age in the end times (see also *Obadiah 1:15-21*).
3. **Final Battle Over Jerusalem** (*Ezek. 38,39*): Here is insight into the final invasion of the Anti-Christ, his forces, and the divine defense of Israel at the Battle of Armageddon.
4. **Reunited Kingdom of Israel** (*Ezek. 37:15-28*): God revealed the fact that there would one day be a unified Israel under the reign of their peace-making Messiah-King.

- Personal Application

In the midst of all the prophecies by Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Obadiah this week, there surfaced a reoccurring challenge that was difficult to ignore. It was the challenge to be a better leader and friend. The passages that seemed to be the most compelling were those found in *Ezekiel 33* and *34*, concerning the sorry shepherd and the wakeful watchman.

Let's look first at the wakeful watchman in *Ezekiel 33:1-9*. Here are some observations:

1. Watchmen have others who *depend on them* for a safe environment.
2. Watchmen *position themselves* in a place to look for the enemy's attacks.
3. Watchmen are *constantly alert* for approaching danger.
4. Watchmen *sound an alarm* to protect the ones they love.
5. Watchmen *do their job*, even if others refuse to heed their warnings.
6. Watchmen *will be held accountable* by God for doing their job faithfully.

Each of us, in a similar way, are called to be watchmen, constantly alert, looking for the enemy, ready to sound the alarm and warn others of his activity, possibly protecting them from harm or terrible setbacks. We are to be watchmen for our families, friends, co-workers, neighbors, community, and country, for all of them are depending on us, God's people, to preserve their lives and well-being in this decadent society. We must be faithful to sound the alarm when any of these are in danger. Have you been a wakeful watchman or a sleepy one? Remember, "Be on the alert and of sober spirit, for our enemy is like a roaring lion, who prowls about seeking someone to devour" (*1 Peter 5:8*).

Let's look at the example of a sorry shepherd (*Ezekiel 34:1-10*). Here are observations:

1. Sorry shepherds *feed themselves* and don't ever consider the needs of their flock.
2. Sorry shepherds *leave the weak* behind and tend to gravitate towards the strong.
3. Sorry shepherds have *no time for the hurting* and no energy or care for the sick.
4. Sorry shepherds *do not pursue* those who are lost but rather press on without them.
5. Sorry shepherds *lord their authority over others* and treat their flock shamefully.
6. Sorry shepherds are (and will be) accountable to God for *neglecting their duties*.
7. Sorry shepherds will be *forced to forfeit the rights and privileges* of leadership influence.

Like the role of the wakeful watchman, we are called to be good shepherds of our flocks. If we were to think for a moment, we would see that God has given each of us a group of people to love, to care for, to protect, and to feed. That flock may be your family, people at work, maybe a group of friends, children, or neighbors, perhaps people you teach. Your flock is really anyone with whom you exert influence or leadership in their lives. Whether you are a leader by nature, or personality, or position does not matter. Anyone can assume the role of a shepherd if he or she is considerate of the needs of others and willing to serve them before serving himself. What kind of shepherd have you been to your flock? When it's all said and done, will you be remembered as a super or sorry shepherd?

The Bottom Line

We are all *watchmen* on the wall for someone, but are you being *vigilant* to watch for the *Enemy*?

Questions to Consider

1. What are the results when there are no watchmen at all? How important is this role?
2. Contrast the sorry shepherd with the Good Shepherd in *Ezekiel 34:11-24*.
3. What trait do you appreciate most in a good shepherd? Which do you appreciate least in a sorry one?
4. What flocks has God given to your care? What sort of leader have you been for them?
5. What area do you need to work on improving regarding being a watchman or shepherd?