

Ezekiel: The Suffering Prophet

01-27-19 AM

Ezekiel was a priest who had been deported with other Israelites in the first captivity of Judah. God called him to be a prophet through an extraordinary vision in Ezekiel 1. In Ezekiel 2 God told him that he would go to the people, but that the people likely would not listen. However, God needed to be just, and it was necessary that a prophet went to them. God warns Ezekiel that this will be a hard work; “thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions” (2:6).

Ezekiel teaches us what it means to suffer. Few were called to suffer like Ezekiel:

POVERTY- Eating the grains of animals (Ezek. 4)

PAIN AND SUFFERING- Laying on his side for 390 days (Ezek. 4)

HUMILIATION - Cut off his beard with a sword (Ezek. 5)

PERSECUTION - Dragged by his hair (Ezek. 8)

PHYSICAL LOSS - Destroying his home (Ezek. 12)

LOSS OF LOVED ONE - His wife is struck down (Ezek. 24)

Why did Ezekiel have to unfairly suffer? First, his suffering was the consequences of the sins of his people. Second, it was necessary so that God might be just in giving Judah a chance to repent. His suffering was to reveal the righteousness of God. Finally, Ezekiel suffered as the “Son of Man”; he was imaging the suffering of Jesus.

According to the bible, suffering comes in many forms. Consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9: “*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*”. There Paul identifies four types of suffering: emotional, physical, mental and spiritual.

Why do we suffer? Some say it is because God is cruel; others think it is a punishment for our sins or for the sins of others. However, suffering is not a punishment for our sins. We find this in Job, but also in places like Luke 13:1-5. There is only one punishment for death: Romans 6:23 says it is eternal death. It is absolute and cannot be escaped by our means. As well, suffering is not a punishment for the sins of others, as stated in Ezekiel 18. We are not punished for an original sin of another. Finally, suffering is not the evidence of the cruelty of God. God became flesh so that He might experience our suffering (Hebrews 2:16-18), and He suffered in all ways as we do.

Suffering is the result of free will and sin. It is because men have the choice to sin, and sin has consequences in this life as well as wages in the next (the wages are the absolute eternal penalty, consequences randomly occur here and now). Consequences exist to

discourage sin; without consequences we might still sin. Therefore, we NEED consequences to avoid the penalty. Suffering is important.

In seeing this we realize suffering has value to the Christian. We are told this in 2 Corinthians 4:17; there Paul says suffering keeps us focused and prepares us for the glory to come. Job 42:5 tells us that suffering produces an intimacy with God. Finally, consider that suffering equips us to be a comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). We want to be comforted in sympathy. Following Christ means sharing HIS sufferings, which were emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental.

What do I do about suffering?

1. Pray – James 5:13-16
2. Share – Galatians 6:2
3. Trust – 1 Peter 5:9-10
4. Read – Romans 15:4
5. Hope - Romans 8:18