

# The Ezekiel warning is an issue that won't go away

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**By Craig White**

SYDNEY, Australia-Should we proclaim the Ezekiel message? Because of a few mistakes in prophetic understanding 35 years ago, should we therefore never again proclaim a strong prophetic warning message? Is the duty of the Church of God to be, among other things, a watchman to the house of Israel, or should it preach only the centrality of Christ? What does the entire Bible say?

## **Back to the future**

The April edition of The Journal published my article "Just What Do You Mean Ezekiel's Message?" under the headline "Writer Urges Consideration of Ezekiel Message." I received responses to that article via E-mail, letter and word of mouth.

What we now need to do is press ahead and ensure that the various Churches of God incorporate this important teaching into their mission statements, constitutions, fundamentals of belief, policies, literature and overall culture. If it is not raised to its proper prominence, it will not be proclaimed.

By way of reiteration, the Ezekiel message is not merely publishing articles on prophecy. It is a particular type of prophecy: a distinct warning to the "lost" tribes of Israel that they will be invaded, conquered and taken into captivity in foreign lands where they will be massacred to the extent that only one tenth of the one third who go into captivity will return in the second Exodus.

We need to warn them that they will go into the most horrible forms of slavery in strange lands! Will the Churches of God get on with the work?

Well, will they, or have they absorbed so much Protestantism from their former association that all they want to do is preach the centrality of Christ without really knowing what that means? Why do so many within the United Church of God not give their full support? Will they, once the UCG gets on with the job?

To these men, the centrality of Christ is preaching about His birth, life, death, resurrection and what He is doing now. While all that is obviously an essential part of our theology and is something our former association taught for many decades, that is not all there is to the story. Here are some often-neglected points to consider:

- Preaching about Christ alone is not what the Bible tells us to do.
- The Bible nowhere teaches the centrality of Christ. It teaches us the centrality of God the Father.
- Christ is not central, except that He is the door to communion with the Father, who is central. (The WCG historically taught the subordination of Christ to the Father.)
- If we are to teach the real centrality of Christ, we must realize that Christ is not limited to the four Gospels and Pauline epistles. Christ is the Word of God, and the whole Bible

exemplifies His character. We can see in both Old and New Testaments how He works with individuals or nations.

It is sad to realize that newer people do not know much about these truths; we have neglected to educate them in these truths. Over the years our literature has gradually watered down the truth. Our magazines lack the zeal and power our material once possessed. Our sermons lack detail and in-depth strong meat. And our church programs have taken on characteristics that, sad to say, are lukewarm.

There will be no growth while we fail to acknowledge these realities. To make matters worse, we have lost 2,500 members since March 1996. Who is to blame for that? Ourselves! Not other people.

So let us get on with the "work," but with the following realizations:

- There can be no real work in a watered-down capacity.
- It must be understood that the work is not to get members, but to give hope to a dying world. If no new members begin to attend our churches, it could be that all God wants is a witness. But it could also mean that we are not providing warm, loving environments for new people.

However, evangelism is not about getting new members. It is about giving information. To evangelize means to pronounce, not to convert people.

- It must involve the entire Church of God, and not just headquarters or home-office folks and elders. As such, a work should include four levels: (1) functions best undertaken at a central office; (2) functions at the regional level; (3) functions at the local-church level; and, of course, (4) personal initiative. They complement each other, and all levels should be utilized.
- Any such work must include, besides the true gospel, the Ezekiel message. This message is not mere prophecy. Rather, it contains a stern rebuke about Israel's performance and a strong warning of future invasion and captivity. Our peoples will be taken as slaves into foreign lands under awful conditions, and few seem interested in trumpeting this warning.

Nevertheless I remain hopeful. Recently some leaders of various Churches of God have made statements about the Ezekiel message:

- Roderick C. Meredith is quoted in *The Journal* (June 27, page 12) as stating: "We have a responsibility to preach the Ezekiel warning to Israel, [which is] the people of the United States and British-descended peoples."

The Global Church of God indeed is attempting to proclaim the message, but it has little to say about the real Ezekiel message as defined above in its literature, although it does have some general prophecy articles.

- Vance Stinson in "The Message of the Watchman" in the Church of God International's *Twenty-First Century Watch* newsletter (July 1997), wrote an excellent article on the subject. He stated: "The watchman's responsibility is to sound the alarm the moment he sees the enemy approaching. If he fails to warn the people and someone is killed in the invasion, the watchman is held responsible."
- David Hulme, president of the United Church of God, recently was quoted as stressing the "concept of an expanded warning" based on understanding Ezekiel's prophecies, which

Herbert W. Armstrong began to preach from the early days of World War II ("Council of Elders Meeting Report," Aug. 27).

One can only ask: When will the UCG acknowledge and proclaim that the house of Israel dwells within northwestern Europe, North America and the white former British colonies? This is essential before being able to pronounce the Ezekiel message. Certainly hints are found within the September-October Good News, pages 12 and E9. But when will it fulfill Christ's command (remember, He is the Word of God, which includes YHWH of the Old Testament) and warn Israel as a watchman? (Ezekiel 3, 33).

Let's quit talking about it, and let's just do it! Come on, Churches of God! Do the work!

Among the excuses given for not proclaiming the Ezekiel message are as follows:

- We don't have the money or resources to proclaim this message. Response: If not, why not? Is God trying to show us something? Should the Churches of God cooperate on this vital issue? Why are the leaders of the groups so possessive about God's flock? Why do they behave in such a way that implies that they own us instead of God Himself? There are so many ways they could cooperate.
- All we have to do is a "work." But my response to this is what kind of work? A so-called work that preaches about the centrality of Christ and the person of Christ but not the entire Bible has some basic and fundamental problems that urgently require fixing.
- We do not have the time, so let's just get ourselves in order first and have a nice little social club with lots of music, praise, singing and little teaching or doctrine. This is a prime Protestant-evangelical attitude and is not based on biblical principles.
- The two witnesses will do the job, so we don't have to. Who says? Christ tells us in no uncertain terms to continue to do the work, no matter how large or small, until His return (Matthew 28:18-20).

In reality, there are no excuses that will impress God. So what should we do about it?

### **Let's get back on the track**

Now for the ultimate question: Who is responsible for preaching this desperately urgent witness and warning message to our peoples and indeed the birthright Anglo-Saxon-Keltic-Nordic nations and their scattered descendants around the globe?

Unmistakably it is the scattered Churches of God, representing the watchman to the modern-day nations that have descended from the lost 10 tribes of Israel!

The Churches of God should proclaim the Ezekiel warning message as a watchman. But what is preventing them from doing so? Here are a list of possibilities, beside the above excuses:

- There has been a loss of knowledge of the identity of the house of Israel. It never ceases to amaze me the number of people who have virtually abandoned these truths; those who have totally abandoned it but who out of fear for the membership will not publicly admit it; and those who feel that it is not that important. They cannot see nor understand the critical importance of this issue. They know not what it means to be a watchman or to trumpet a warning to our peoples.

- They know not the seriousness of their calling, wishing to live in accordance with sections of the New Testament alone, rather than the entire Word of God. To them, Ezekiel is not important and not to be emphasized. These people have absorbed too much Protestantism and cannot see it.
- Finances are lacking. Why is this so? One reason may be that God is trying to teach us something: Instead of church leaders fighting over who is boss and their petty differences, we should be seeking cooperation. The way that the churches attack each other is exceedingly carnal and is a severe test of our character. God is indeed watching us; don't our church leaders know that? Or do they justify their constant attacks (either subtle or open)?
- There is a lack of emphasis on prophecy, the identity of Israel and the coming conquest of Israel. It is claimed by some that there has been too much emphasis on these issues in the past. However, I have almost every Plain Truth since 1934, and we had only 10 to 20 percent of articles on prophecy. The Good News had only about three articles on the "lost" tribes of Israel, and we had only one book and one reprint article on Israel.

So how on earth could some claim we overemphasized it? In all my years in the WCG I heard only two sermons on the topic of Israel and extremely few on prophecy. To be quite honest, we in the UCG aren't doing much worse than that, which isn't saying much.

To enable the Churches of God to do a work, they need to cooperate. It would seem that God is testing our character to see if we are haughty or humble enough. Here are a few simple examples of possible areas of interchurch cooperation:

We should publish articles in each other's magazines. Elders and other members should be encouraged to visit each other's churches. We should hold Feasts of Tabernacles in close proximity to each other, permitting members and elders to visit each other's sites. We should run joint advertisements and link to each other's Web sites.

These suggestions are not that difficult to implement. It can only come down to a matter of pride and self-will that prevents us from cooperating. Given that we are so small, the Churches of God need to cooperate, not only survive, but to do a work, to warn our peoples.

It is up to us to put Ezekiel's message in the proper context. The Churches of God must take up the cause before the coming punishments and disasters occur. Right here in the land down under-Australia-the populace generally continues on its current path, blissfully ignorant of the terrible dangers awaiting it.

All the world knows that Australia will play host to the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000, but only a handful know that this country is under a biblical curse for national disobedience extending back more than 2,500 years. Unless the nation repents and turns to God, it is under a curse of impending captivity and punishment.

Ezekiel's message is not merely plain prophecy of future events. It is specifically a message of national captivity, slavery, torture and the scattering of the nation to the four winds in the most disgusting and shocking conditions imaginable.

Yet it dovetails beautifully into the gospel message of the Messiah who shall save the enslaved and usher in a golden age of peace and plenty. Ezekiel, therefore, also contains a message of hope, protection, love and blessings for those who repent.

Ezekiel 33 makes it clear that, if Israel's watchman does not blow a trumpet-blast warning about impending captivity, the bloodshed of many will be on his head. The truth about Israel, detailed prophecy and the warning watchman are among the most critical issues facing the Churches of God!

It is saddening to so many Church of God members who in the almost 12 years since the passing of Mr. Armstrong have done so little to trumpet this message, whether in published or electronic-media form.

Yet we are the ones entrusted by God to carry out this responsibility: one of the most important given to any group of people in history!

Clearly, the only conclusion one can draw from Ezekiel 33:6 is that, if we do not carry out this vital mission, the blood of many will be on our heads. Let us now see if various Church of God leaders will be self-willed and come up with excuses, refusing to listen to the general membership, to cooperate and, more important, to bow to God's Word.

The obvious consensus of the membership is for our leaders to cooperate. We do not ask them to step down from their positions. Their self-will has caused many to lose faith and to leave the churches. God holds the shepherds responsible for the hardening of their hearts and requiring the members of the other churches to join their church. This absolute childishness would be laughable were it not so serious.

It would also seem that enough doctrinal error and watering down has found its way into our midst from our former association that we need to radically rethink our position and approach.

In late 1995 I forwarded comments and input to the UCG on the original draft constitution with a suggestion for a new clause to ensure inter-Sabbatarian cooperation. The updated suggestion is as follows, and it should be revisited by UCG as well as other Churches of God:

#### **Proposed Article 14: Inter-Sabbatarian cooperation**

"14.1: It is mentioned elsewhere in these bylaws that the UCG does not consider itself to be the only true church, nor is it exclusivist. As such it will endeavor to break down the barriers with other Churches of God and cooperate in any way possible (e.g., joint Feast sites and sharing resources) with similar groups.

"14.2: As such, the leadership of the UCG will attempt to establish a General Advisory Council of Churches of God. The council will meet at least once each year to attempt to break down barriers, establish dialogue and ascertain whether joint activities are feasible. It is envisaged that the council will include the leadership of the churches on it.

"14.3: All members will be given a copy of any policy or guideline on inter-Sabbatarian cooperation, and any news on such cooperation will be announced at Sabbath services and published in the church's periodicals.

"14.4: No member, elder or pastor will be prevented from visiting or attending another positive Sabbath-observing group or reading material from another Sabbath-observing group and will not be disciplined or censured for doing so.

"14.5: Other Sabbath-observing Churches of God may affiliate with the UCG to undertake a joint 'work.' The guidelines for such affiliations are produced separately by the board. No application for affiliation is automatic."

What now, Churches of God?

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