

The Remnant and Its Mission

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that we are part of God's remnant Church; that there is a special work for us to do at this time in Earth's history. We have a mission and purpose to fulfil in our lives each day! What does that look like practically? Have we learned the lessons taught by the experiences of the early church? Are we living up to the light we have? What is the mission and purpose of God's remnant church?

- It's about conflict, with the promise of victory in Christ.
- It's about salvation—that none may be lost.
- It's about letting the mind of Christ be in you.
- It's about the bigger picture of eternity with Him.

The invitation is open for all to be part of the mission and fulfil our purpose for living!

The postmodern person, who also could be a church member, may suggest the pastor and church should do nothing to alert others of the struggles, consequences, or even dangers of our behaviours. Instead, in their opinion, the pastor and church should simply "love" them and let them be. "Live and let live," some will say. "After all, who are we to judge and cast the first stone?"

But what is a truly loving response in such situations? Before we look to the Bible for the answer, consider a recent tweet posted by someone whose home burned to the ground in the 2018 Camp Fire in California: "To the annoying person who drove through my neighbourhood yesterday a.m. honking like a maniac and waking me from a pleasant sleep: Thank you. You saved my life." The warning sound of that horn, while unsolicited, unwelcomed, and unwanted at the time, saved a life. Likewise, pastors and churches need to lovingly sound the warning so that people who are spiritually asleep, tangled in the web of sin, can escape the fire that is coming.

WHAT JESUS PREACHED

John the Baptist, Peter, and Jesus Christ Himself all preached the same message: "Repent!" They called people to turn away from sin and wickedness so that their sins could be forgiven. John, Peter, and Jesus Christ were watchmen on the walls.

What does it mean to be a watchman on the wall? Here is how one Bible dictionary defines the term *watchman*: "A sentinel [protector/lookout] appointed to guard a specified area against predators, thieves, etc., to watch for messengers, and to give the alarm in case enemy forces approach or threaten attack."

AN OLD TESTAMENT WATCHMAN

The prophet Ezekiel was such a watchman on the wall. God gave him a difficult assignment, that of warning the Israelites, whom He described as a "rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me' " (Ezek. 2:3). The Lord even told Ezekiel that the nation would not listen to him, yet still called him to be faithful in giving the message no matter how the people responded (Ezek. 3:7, 11).

What was going on with Israel, and why did God summon Ezekiel to present them with such a solemn warning? Not only had the children of Israel rejected God's judgments, laws, and divine decrees (Ezek. 5:5–7), they had even defiled His holy temple with pagan

images and practices (Ezek. 5:11). And notice the very emotional terminology God used: “I was crushed [other translations say, “broken,” “hurt,” “grieved”] by their adulterous heart which has departed from me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols” (Ezek. 6:9).

Israel’s sin—their adulterous heart—deeply hurt God. The *Andrews Study Bible* comments on this text say that it “expresses God’s grief at being abandoned by His adulterous wife, Israel.” Unfortunately, it was not the first time Israel had grieved the Lord, as indicated by the psalmist: “How often they provoked Him [“rebelled against Him” NASB] in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!” (Ps. 78:40).

When Israel sinned, when they rebelled against the Lord, it deeply grieved Him. Today, in the twenty-first century, God still greatly mourns the sins of His people.

Like me, maybe you also know the deep pain that sin inflicts. Perhaps someone sinned against you, causing almost unbearable hurt. Can you relate to God when He says that He was crushed by Israel’s adulterous heart? Sin causes God pain, just as it brings us pain, sorrow, and heartache.

Ezekiel’s message from the Lord, his “Thus says the Lord” proclamation, includes a rebuke for defiling God’s temple with detestable things and practices. Ezekiel 8 describes the “image of jealousy” and other abominations that made God go “far away from [His] sanctuary” (vv. 5, 6). “Various conjectures have been made as to the identity of this image, such as, that it represents Baal, Molech, or Astarte. But perhaps ‘image of jealousy’ was not designed as a proper name designating a particular heathen deity, but rather as a descriptive name of an image that provoked the Lord to jealousy. The setting up of a rival god in the place dedicated to the worship of Yahweh would produce such an effect. There may have been heathen idols in the Temple at this time.”

God’s people had desecrated His temple with heathen idols, pushing Him away from His own sanctuary. Previously, He had told Moses to build a sanctuary so that He could dwell among His people.⁶ Hundreds of years later, in Ezekiel’s time, Israel was repulsing Him from His sanctuary. That is what sin does—separates humanity from God.

Then the book of Ezekiel describes the 70 elders as offering incense to the crawling things, abominable beasts, and idols portrayed on the walls all around the sanctuary (Ezek. 8:7–12). The 70 elders were not only offering incense to idols but they had also deceived themselves into thinking that the true God did not even see what they were doing. But they were sadly mistaken, as the Scripture declares: “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

The Lord then told Ezekiel about three “greater abominations” (Ezek. 8:13–17): (1) women weeping for Tammuz (2) men worshiping the sun, and (3) violence filling the land.

Tammuz was a Babylonian vegetation god, whom the ancients believed died every fall and then was resurrected from the dead every spring by another deity. The women of Israel were weeping over the supposed death of Tammuz, a false god. Thus, he was a counterfeit to the Messiah—Jesus—who did die and was really resurrected on the third day.

The book of Ezekiel clearly reveals the great struggle between Christ and Satan. The devil had led Israel away from God and into false worship. God's people were so deceived and so off course that they were even worshiping the sun. The phrase "they have filled the land with violence" (Ezek. 8:17) is the same as that used in Genesis 6:11 to describe the people who lived before the global Flood destroyed everything on earth.

When God termed Israel as a rebellious nation, He had a good reason for it. Nevertheless, He called Ezekiel to confront the people. To encourage him, three times in Ezekiel 2:6 the Lord instructs him not to be afraid: (1) " 'Do not be afraid of them,' " (2) " 'nor be afraid of their words,' " and (3) " 'do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks.' "

Ezekiel's challenging task as a watchman was to warn the people for God (Ezek. 3:16–21). " 'Give them warning from Me' " (v. 17). But in doing so, the prophet did not present his own message, but, rather, he presented the one God sent through him. If Ezekiel failed to give the divine warning to the wicked, they would die in their sins, and God would hold him accountable for not delivering it.

On the other hand, if he did present the proper warning message from God and the wicked continued to refuse to repent, they would still die in their sins, but Ezekiel's hands would be clean—he had obediently given them God's warning message. That is why the Lord told him to faithfully present the message whether the people listened or not.

Notice that verses 18 and 19 are God's warning to the *wicked*. Its goal was their salvation. He wanted them to be saved. Then in verses 20 and 21, God directs Ezekiel to warn the *righteous* who might turn away from their righteousness. Verse 21 specifically declares that "the righteous should not sin."

Watchmen on the walls do not have an easy job. Who likes to be confronted about their sin and told to repent? Yet, it is imperative that we remember that it is a message from the Lord Himself. Ezekiel did not originate it—when he presented the warning, he was obeying God's specific instruction to do so. Its purpose was to save souls. God's message to Israel through Ezekiel is one of repentance. " 'Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations'"'" (Ezek. 14:6).

John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Ezekiel, and many others in the Bible preached repentance. God wants people to repent so that their sins can be forgiven and thrown to the bottom of the sea. He longs for them to repent so that they can live with Him throughout eternity.

Later, God again calls Ezekiel in chapter 33 to be a watchman to warn His people. " 'You [Ezekiel] shall hear a word from My [God's] mouth and warn them for Me' " (v. 7). The Lord makes it clear that He finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked (v. 11). Rather, the whole purpose of the warning messages the watchmen are to give is so that the wicked will turn, turn, turn (that word appears three times in verse 11) away from their sin in genuine repentance. Wanting to save as many people as possible, God commissions the solemn message of warning through His watchmen.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY WATCHMAN

I have found at least three groups of people whom God calls to be watchmen on the walls today. The first group is ministers—pastors. Ellen White writes, "To every minister the Lord

declares: ‘O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it . . . thou hast delivered thy soul.’ Ezekiel 33:7–9.” Pastors are to be watchmen on the walls. Then a few paragraphs later she adds, “It is the privilege of the watchmen on the walls of Zion to live so near to God, and to be susceptible to the impressions of His Spirit, that He can work through them to tell men and women of their peril and point them to the place of safety. Faithfully are they to warn them of the sure result of transgression, and faithfully are they to safeguard the interests of the church. At no time may they relax their vigilance. Theirs is a work requiring the exercise of every faculty of the being. In trumpet tones their voices are to be lifted, and never are they to sound one wavering, uncertain note. Not for wages are they to labour, but because they cannot do otherwise, because they realize that there is a woe upon them if they fail to preach the gospel. Chosen of God, sealed with the blood of consecration, they are to rescue men and women from impending destruction.”

Please do not miss that last line. God calls watchmen to give a warning message in order to “rescue men and women from impending destruction.”

Some might question this biblical teaching, suggesting that it is unloving and judgmental and that we have no right to judge. But the biblical teaching is that God’s watchmen are not presenting their own message. They are delivering His message of warning to people. We must never forget that He wrote the Ten Commandments, and He commissions watchmen to warn those breaking His commandments. And God’s desire through the warning is that people will repent, turn from their evil ways, and let Him rescue them from impending destruction.

Pastors are the first group of watchmen. As a pastor, I desperately need God’s help to be faithful in my duty. It is not easy to present the warning message to people. During the closing scenes of this world’s history, we need faithful watchmen on the walls leading the church—pastors with the courage of John the Baptist, who faithfully warned a powerful king named Herod that it was wrong to have his brother’s wife (Mark 6:18).

The second group of watchmen are spiritual leaders, including elders, teachers, and school and church administrators. One commentary explains that “in the ancient Orient danger constantly threatened, and it was necessary for watchmen to be ever on the alert. Every spiritual leader is a watchman, whose duty it is to stand guard upon the walls of Zion.” Spiritual leaders in every capacity have the responsibility of being watchmen on the walls.

The third group described as a watchman is the church in general—and fathers and mothers specifically. Ellen White reminds us that “God has appointed the church as a watchman, to have a jealous care over the youth and children, and as a sentinel to see the approach of the enemy and give warning of danger. But the church does not realize the situation. She is sleeping on guard. In this time of peril, fathers and mothers must arouse and work as for life, or many of the youth will be forever lost.”

Therefore, Heaven summons the entire church body to be watchmen. The church needs to warn of the danger its members face. With God’s help, the church can wake up—it is no time for sleeping. It has a particular responsibility to care for youth and children.

The salvation of many young people depends upon the faithful watchmen of the church, including their own parents. The salvation of close family and friends is especially of concern here. God has commissioned His church to help all to turn from evil and be saved.

As watchmen, let us pray for each other and then work faithfully together to warn people so that they can repent and be saved. As we work together, we can know that God will work with us because He has given us this assignment. As He said to Ezekiel many times, He also says to us, "Do not be afraid." God will give us wisdom and strength to do and say what He wants us to—in the right way, at the right time, and with the right spirit. May God enable us all to be faithful watchmen on the walls as we lovingly seek to rescue men, women, and young people from impending destruction?