

EZEKIEL ... and his sermon about three great men
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(EZEKIEL 14:14)

Ezekiel was interested ; the elders of Israel were approaching to seek an audience with the prophet of God. Calmly he stood to welcome them ; he bade them be seated, but before he could enquire concerning the purpose of their visit his spirit stirred within him, and a voice whispered, " Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?" (14: 3). The elders were a little dumbfounded when Ezekiel commenced to preach. His condemnation of Israel, and his comments concerning Jerusalem, were terrible. And when he finally said, " Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord," the picture seemed blacker than ever.

A Man Great in Preaching

"Though Noah were in it he should deliver but his own soul." The elders of Israel instantly thought of their sacred records. The sin of the antediluvian world had been so abominable that God had been obliged to send judgment. Noah, a faithful preacher, had witnessed of God's righteousness ; but his message had been rejected. Yet the Lord had been very gracious, for Noah had been the means of saving his family. Eight souls had been preserved within the ark, and the human race had not perished entirely. Yet now God declared that even were Noah present in this sinful land, he would be unable to save any other person. "Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves " (v. 18).

A Man Great in Prayer

"Though Daniel were in it . . . he should deliver but his own soul." Daniel was a man of prayer . . . a friend of God, and the greatest figure in the nation. In spite of persecutors, this fearless man deliberately opened his windows and prayed with his face toward Jerusalem. At other times, when the wise men of Babylon were threatened with annihilation, this same Daniel sought an audience with God, and discovered all he wished to know. He was a man of the same calibre as Abraham, who knew how to prevail with God. The elders of Israel remembered how the patriarch had interceded for Sodom, and how, although he ultimately failed to save the city, at least his intercession delivered Lot and his two daughters. While the elders considered these things, Ezekiel repeated his former statement, "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves."

A Man Great in Patience

" Though Job were in it . . . he should deliver but his own soul." This was the prophet's greatest statement, for Job stood alone in splendid magnificence. The Lord had said concerning him, " Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil " (Job 1: 8). The account of Job's steadfastness under trial, and of his subsequent triumph when God abundantly rewarded him for his faithfulness, was known to all Israel. Job was the man

EZEKIEL ... and his sermon about three great men who could stand against any force of evil. Ezekiel shook his head and answered, " No." If these three saints had been transformed into one super man-if Noah had continually preached if the prayers of Daniel had been added to Noah's preaching and if this mighty effort had been sustained by the patience of Job-" Though these three men were in it . . . they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves." Probably the elders were despondent as they heard these words ; their case was hopeless!

A God Great in Pity

The end of Ezekiel's message was astonishing ; the preacher suddenly introduced a new note to his theme. An unmistakable tenderness shone in his eyes, as he said, "Thus saith the Lord God. . . . Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted . . . and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God " (vv. 21-23). Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were present, they would not be able to rescue one son nor one daughter. Yet, God would rescue both sons and daughters. God's grace is always greater than man's sin, "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy . . . " (Psa. 103: 1 1).

O Love of God, how strong, how true:
Eternal, and yet ever new.

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