

Rabbi Tovia Singer Explains Ezekiel 3:16-19

It happened at the end of [the] seven-day period that the word of HASHEM came to me, saying, "Son of Man, I have appointed you a sentinel for the House of Israel; when you hear a matter from My mouth, you shall warn them on My behalf. When I say of a wicked one, 'You shall surely die!' and you do not warn him, and do not speak up to warn the wicked one concerning his evil way, to save his life, then he, the wicked one, will die for his iniquity and I will demand his blood from your hand. But if you did warn the wicked one, yet he does not turn away from his wickedness and from his evil way, he will die for his iniquity. And as for you, you will have saved your soul."¹

It's a great question and frankly, I'm surprised that it's not asked more frequently. This is a theme not only in Ezekiel, but in Tanakh. And that is, if I see you spiritually smoking a cigarette and I don't tell you, then I am held accountable for it. It's really that simple. Imagine the onus, imagine the responsibility that a prophet has. And Ezekiel revisits this over and over again, you find it in Ezekiel 33. That is if you see somebody in sin, doing something that's very dangerous, and you don't want them, then you bear the responsibility and consequence of that person's actions. It's really just that simple. If you don't, if you see someone who's blind, walking down the street, and a car is coming, and you don't interfere in some way, then you're held accountable for that. If you're observing a nation that's engaged in iniquity, and you don't say anything, then you're held accountable. Conversely, if you see someone who's turned down the wrong path, and you warn that person, that person repents, then God accounts that for an act of righteousness and you benefit from that. There's nothing complicated going on here. You have, I have a responsibility to warn nations about the dangers of idolatry. And if I don't, God will hold me accountable for it.

I have told Christians for a very long time if you're not open to hearing the truth of the Torah, don't listen to me, shut me off. Don't. Watch reruns of I Love Lucy and Seinfeld. Don't listen to me. Because if you listen and, it's not me, if you look at the Torah, if you look at the Prophets, and you still refuse to repent, so God will hold you accountable. Conversely, if a person doesn't know any better, then God doesn't hold that person accountable, we see that happen over and over in Tanakh.

So, what's happened, that's why it's possible Ezekiel even lie on one side or another side, because every prophet bears some responsibility for inadequacy, which he could have, could have

¹ Artscroll Translation.

intervened for look for. Look at Eli, Eli was my great, great grandfather. That's the family line that I come from. Eli was held accountable. He himself did not engage in the corruption that went on in the tabernacle. But he was too quiet. He didn't say enough. And he paid for that. That's why he paid for that. So all that's coming into view is something that's really simple.

If you see someone, if I'm walking down the street, anywhere, and I see two 12 year old kids, you know, trying to light a cigarette, I'm gonna say something, say something in the best way I know how, don't do that, in a way that won't offend them. I hopefully will, you know, and I always hope that I say it. When I see people out there behaving badly, I don't want people I care about to drive drunk. And I hope and pray that Hashem gives me the wisdom to be able to convey this message in a manner that doesn't hurt people's feelings. I don't know if I've succeeded. There are a lot of people who are angry at me. But I don't know. I don't know. I don't know, I try my best.

But Ezekiel. This is a theme and Ezekiel here and then [chapter] 33. If you don't warn people, and you see it, you're going to carry, you're going to bear the burden. Of course, of course. Of course, if you allow something like that happen, you don't speak up. Now, I want to say this to you. And I'm speaking to folks who asked me this question almost daily, like, what do I say to my cousins? They're all Christians. What do I say to my mom, she's a Christian? What do I say to my dad? What do I say to my 22 year old son who's a Christian? And it's kind of my fault because I raised him a Christian. And now I'm done with it. So you have to assess the situation meaning assess, is that individual going to, is that, is your mom going to be able to digest it or not? Is there just too much stuff going on between the two of you, where she's just going to be to hurt and offended, and she's going to take you're turning to the Jewish faith as a rejection of her because you basically saying, 'Mom, you raised me wrong, you taught me wrong, you know, you weren't a good mother, you, you raised me and idolatry.' You be very, **very careful**, right.

And sometimes the best way to bear witness to someone so that they might repent is, by as a moving portrait by your own life, you can convey, you know, there are 10 ways to say the same thing. Really, sometimes you don't have to say it, you can just demonstrate it. Really can, you have to weigh everything very carefully. If your marriage is an enormous amount of trouble in general, you're not going to be able to convince your wife, you know that she shouldn't worship idolatry because she, you know, you're just having trouble asking your wife to have soup for lunch, right? So it's really a good idea to repair your relationship with your dad before you even talk to him about God, he just won't be able to digest it. You have to use a lot of wisdom. Proverbs 22. You have to teach someone according to their ability and going to their understanding.

So the warning is that if you can do it and you don't do it, you're going to be held accountable. But you need wisdom. Remember we talked about wisdom last week? You never pray for doctrine.

You never asked how many persons are there in the Godhead, chas v'chalila. Never, never ask: who is God? Look to the Torah for that. Never, never pray, who is the Messiah? You look to the Bible for that. Always, please. But you always ask for wisdom. Always, and in fact a Jew when she is in prayer, after acknowledging who God is, that He's the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And after recognising that He is the Creator of the universe, the first request that she submits is, You are the One who could give wisdom, please, I need wisdom. Always ask for wisdom first. Or you won't even know how to pray. Always, always, always ask for wisdom.

So ask Hashem for wisdom and understanding and how to speak to people, you know, and if someone doesn't like you, they're not going to want to learn from you. It's really simple. There are people perhaps, that you know of, who are, who are very knowledgeable about a certain topic, about a certain issue, about a certain subject, but you just don't like that person, right? So you don't want to learn from them. So don't become that person. Like, don't, don't, don't be annoying. Be you know, repair the relationship with the person that you want to talk to, be honest, truthful, but be careful and be thoughtful and be sensitive. But you do have a responsibility to give rebuke in a way that people will be able to receive it, the Messiah will do that perfectly. Isaiah chapter 2 [and] 11. All over the place, and make sure they can receive it. And if you could have done it, and you don't do it, then God will hold you accountable. It's really just that simple. Thank you for your question.²

² Tenak Talk (TaNaCh), 'Is Speaking in Tongues Mentioned in the Old Testament? Rabbi Tovia Singer 1532' (YouTube, 6/02/2023, 27:47) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3jBxLaiSus>>.