

## Prayer

You heal my body, Lord Jesus, and I thank You.  
You heal my spirit, Holy Spirit, and I thank You.  
You heal my soul, Father God, and I thank You.  
Make me whole, Almighty God, for You are one;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Work to increase the time you spend in prayer today, so that you can spend a little more time with God, for no other reason than that you want to do it.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the courts of justice:** Pray for anyone you know who may be facing legal action, under whatever circumstances. Be careful not to make inappropriate judgements.
- Give thanks to God for the gifts He has given you and the freedom to express those gifts. If you do not enjoy that freedom, pray to break down the barriers which prevent it.
- Pray for countries in Northern Africa, where there is popular instability, especially Egypt, and Tunisia. Pray for the governments of these countries

## Meditation

We call upon You, Living Lord,  
Saviour and friend of all who accept You.

Heal us from the sicknesses of our disturbed world  
Which flood our souls with destruction; for example,

By the language of swearing and abuse,  
Or by degrading pornographic images,

By glamorised television perversions of love,  
Or by the social lottery of care or health provision,

By social pressure to be like everyone else,  
Or by financial pressure to spend, spend, spend.

Show us the light of Christ and the power of the Spirit  
Which leads us through this world's darkness;

And brings us even now to a place of peace,  
Which is Your Kingdom of 'faith, hope and love'.

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## Bible passage - Ezekiel 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup> In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

<sup>2</sup> On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), <sup>3</sup> the word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there.

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## Bible Study

### Review

The prophecy of Ezekiel is a remarkable piece of literature, and it stands together with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah as the greatest of the prophetic books of the Bible. It contains a series of extraordinary visions and prophecies, some of which have become very well known. The most famous, of course, being the visions of the glory of God in chapters 1-3, and the vision of the Valley of dry bones in chapter 37.

In common with many other prophetic books, it begins simply with an introduction. In the first verse, Ezekiel presents himself and the fact that God had granted him visions, and he provides a date for these visions. They occurred on the fifth day of the fourth month and the thirtieth year. But we do not know what he means by the thirtieth year, and as we read through Ezekiel's prophecy, we will find that it is quite important that we know when he spoke.

There are a number of theories about the meaning of *'thirtieth'* in verse one. In ancient times, it was common for people to date events according to the number of years that a King had been on the throne. Here, Ezekiel was in Babylon, a nation that had been founded just three decades previously under the great king Nabopolassar, so it is just possible that Ezekiel used the date of his reign. Alternatively, some suggest that this was a particularly important year for Ezekiel, because young men of priestly families such as he only became fully fledged priests on their 30th birthday. Verse three of our passage identifies Ezekiel as a priest, so it is just possible that this is what he meant.

Reading on, verses 2 and 3 sound quite different to verse 1. In the first verse, Ezekiel speaks personally, *'I was among the exiles by the river, Chebar'*; but in the second verse, a writer describes Ezekiel by saying, *'the word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel'* (verse 2). Over the years, some have become convinced that verses 2 and 3 were written by somebody other than Ezekiel, and perhaps added later. But it is quite possible that Ezekiel wrote verses 2 and 3 to provide a more formal introduction to his prophetic work, using an accepted style of writing. The manner of writing in verses 2 and 3 is remarkably similar to the introduction of other prophetic works such as found in Amos (Amos 1:1, 2), and Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1).

Verses 2 and 3 tells us that Ezekiel's vision came on the fifth day of the month, but in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin. This is clearly an alternative way of dating these visions, using the standard Jewish method of dating by reference to their Kings. King Jehoiachin was the last Judean king, and he reigned only three months in 598 BC, at which point he was carried off into exile in Babylon. Clearly, the visions came five years later.

It is difficult for us to imagine fully the emotions of those Israelites who were first carried off from Jerusalem, somewhere around 598 BC. Everything they believed about God had been destroyed. The Temple had been pulled down, the people of Israel had been forcibly removed from their beloved Jerusalem, even from Israel itself. Yet many of their prophets, later proven to be false, had told them that they were safe in Jerusalem and that God would never leave them or forsake them. When the Babylonians smashed Jerusalem to the ground, they destroyed not just the nation, but the hopes of God's people and their belief in their Lord God, who they believed resided in the Temple.

So, imagine the situation in which Ezekiel found himself. If we accept the theory that *'thirtieth'* in verse 1 refers to Ezekiel, then at the time of the Exile he was 25 years old, and five years away from becoming a fully fledged priest. Yet, in the very year he attained that status, even though he was living in Babylon and experiencing the awfulness of a nation in exile, God revealed Himself to Ezekiel. It must have been an extraordinary moment. Before God spoke, Ezekiel might have wondered whether his priesthood had any meaning, but here in Babylon he saw God in a vision, and we may be fairly certain that his life was changed thereafter.

We have not yet begun to read about the amazing visions of Ezekiel, but even in these simple verses, it is obvious that something very powerful is happening. The message of the book of Ezekiel is that God is powerful to break through the confines of human history and reveal Himself to those who are ready to hear Him. He is at work, take notice!

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## Discipleship

### *Questions (for use in groups)*

1. In what ways does God break through into human history today?
2. What does this passage of Scripture teach about the nature of God, and how He speaks to people?
3. Discuss in your group what you know about the exiles in Babylon. Use a Bible dictionary or Concordance to look up passages of Scripture that will tell you more.

## **Personal comments by author**

*There is no one who can force God to speak. Anyone might want God to speak, but He will reveal Himself when He is ready and in His time. There are many ways in which people try to manipulate God and other people, and it is possible for someone to pretend that they have heard Him. For this reason, it is vital that God's people test anything that purports to be a prophecy. One thing is certain, when God speaks it will be important, so much so that it is God's Word revealed authoritatively. God's people must always be ready for such a Word of God, and for him to use unexpected people to deliver it.*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Have you ever heard a prophecy in church, or spoken one yourself? Does it measure up to the kind of prophecy that we find in the Old Testament? Think and pray about this for as long as necessary.*
- *Pray that God's people, the Church, will be ready to receive His Word, however it is delivered. Pray that they will test what they hear, and act upon it.*

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord God Almighty, open our ears so that we may hear your Word. Speak to us with love, hope, and understanding, so that we recognise your voice, whenever you speak, and lighten our hearts with your Word and bring us joy, we pray AMEN

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