

## Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, each day is Your precious gift to us. May we not live as if this was just another 'normal' day, but as if You might indeed use it for Your glory! May we not stand back from doing what is right for others and ourselves, but present ourselves for Your service and trust in the empowerment of Your Spirit! For You are worthy of all our praise, Lord Jesus Christ; this day is Your day. AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Pray in absolute silence. Do not try to fill the silence with your words, but listen to what the Lord says.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for disenfranchised people throughout the world:** *Pray for people in South America whose lives are blighted because of cultural isolation*
- *Give thanks to God for teachers who give of themselves to offer good education*
- *Pray today for people who live in fear of others within their own families, because of verbal, mental or physical abuse*

## Meditation

Speak now, Lord God, in words that inspire  
So we may be fed by the gift of Your presence

Speak now, in words of challenge and vision  
So we may be encouraged for what lies ahead

Speak now, in words of love and support  
So we may be empowered for action and service

Speak now, in words of wisdom and power  
So we may be fed by them, both night and day

Speak now, in words of faith and sound teaching  
So we may discern the integrity of Your Word

Speak now, in words of assurance and comfort  
So we may come close to the source of all life

Speak now, in words of peace and endurance  
So we may take hold of Your blessings, for ever.

---

## Bible passage - Ezekiel 3:12-21

<sup>12</sup> Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the LORD rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling; <sup>13</sup> it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a loud rumbling. <sup>14</sup> The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me.

<sup>15</sup> I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who lived by the river Chebar, and I sat there among them, stunned, for seven days. <sup>16</sup> At the end of seven days, the word of the LORD came to me:

<sup>17</sup> Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. <sup>18</sup> If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give them no warning, or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way, in order to save their life, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity; but their blood I will require at your hand. <sup>19</sup> But if you warn the wicked, and they do

not turn from their wickedness, or from their wicked way, they shall die for their iniquity; but you will have saved your life.

<sup>20</sup> Again, if the righteous turn from their righteousness and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before them, they shall die; because you have not warned them, they shall die for their sin, and their righteous deeds that they have done shall not be remembered; but their blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup> If, however, you warn the righteous not to sin, and they do not sin, they shall surely live, because they took warning; and you will have saved your life.

---

## Bible Study

### Review

It is difficult to imagine what Ezekiel felt. He was a young Israelite priest caught up in the tragedy of his times, and living with his compatriots in Babylon, shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. This young man was then chosen by God to be His prophet, because He had some important things to say to His people. What must he have felt then as God caught him up in a vision (1:3-3:11), and then began to explain the importance of the prophetic word he would bear (3:3:17-21)?

Ezekiel's vision was extensive. The first chapter of his book reads like more than a vision, for Ezekiel not only saw the glory of God, he was caught up in it (2:1f.) as God gave him a scroll to eat, symbolising his prophetic task (2:8f.). In the vision, the Lord told Ezekiel what he wanted him to do; his task was to confront his own people, Israel, because they had rebelled against God. At the end of the vision (3:12-14), Ezekiel saw again the great throne borne on wheels by creatures with wings, and was again caught up in its splendour. But instead of being glad about this, Ezekiel was not! He was lifted up *'in bitterness in the heat of my spirit'* (3:14), and the Hebrew text makes it obvious that Ezekiel was angry!

Why was this? What would any one of us give for a vision of God! For Ezekiel, however, life would now change. Throughout this book, we read of a man who was required to be absolutely dedicated to his task. It was as if Ezekiel's normal life had ended and he was now God's total servant, and he had no choice! Moreover, God demanded obedience to every fine detail of his instructions, and the things Ezekiel endured on God's behalf almost beggar belief. Later on, for example, we find him making a model of the siege of Jerusalem and lying against it on his side for 390 days (4:4,5), and then a further 40 days (4:6). All this with a diet fixed by God (4:9f.), and to Ezekiel's personal offence, baked on dung (4:12-15)!

The main thrust of today's passage is the startling Word of God about the role of the prophet, delivered twice for emphasis, in both verses 17 to 19, and 20 to 21. The gist of this message is the same, and even though it all sounds conditional because of the word 'if' used throughout (3:17,8,19 etc), it is crystal clear. Israel is heading for destruction, so God needs a prophet who will warn His people, and there is no escaping what lies ahead. If the prophet will not speak, people will die, and God will blame the prophet for not doing his job; *'but their blood I will require at your hand'* (3:18,20). Ezekiel must save his own life and that of others by delivering God's messages, or he will die with the rebellious people!

It is not too hard to grasp the two prophecies, because despite a few differences, they are very similar. In both verses 19 and 21, the prophet is required to do his job so that justice is done. If the prophet does not obey and warn the people, then they will die in ignorance along with the prophet. If he does, then the prophet will save his life and those of the people who heed his call, whilst those who continue to rebel against God will die, despite any 'good works' they have done (3:20). This is a tough but just message, and it gives Ezekiel no room for manoeuvre. He would not be able to negotiate with God like Moses (see Exodus 3,4) or Isaiah (6:11), and he would not be able to question his call, as did Jeremiah (Jer 1:9f.). If he wanted to live, he had to do God's will.

Whenever Israel went astray, the Lord had always previously appointed a prophet to tell the people what they had done wrong, and warn them of the consequences. Now that Israel had paid a dire penalty for her rebellion in the loss of Jerusalem and the Temple, it was all the more important that God find a faithful man through whom he could deliver His Word. If Israel was to be saved, she needed a prophet. Centuries before, Isaiah had prophesied about the Exile. Jeremiah had delivered God's Word inside Jerusalem even while it was under siege from Babylon, but he was abandoned and ended his life in Egypt (Jer 44:1f.). It was Ezekiel who became the 'prophet of the Exile', living mostly with the exiles in Babylon (though he later went to Jerusalem – chs 8 and 9). He was the man God needed.

Some of the first prophets in Israel were independent people, living in bands and consulted by Kings (1 Samuel 10:1-13). As time went by, we find that prophets such as Isaiah were men of faithful witness and service, sometimes in difficult circumstances (see Amos – chapter 7). Their lives as well as their words spoke about God. Then by the time of Ezekiel, Israel's peril was acute because of her continued rebellion against the Lord, and this meant that the prophet had to be totally committed and personally identified with the message he brought. It was a powerful call and it brought great strain on the man, but as we will see, Ezekiel was up to the task!

---

## Discipleship

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

1. What do you make of Ezekiel's description of God's glory? Is it like anything else you know or have known?
2. If God calls someone to a task, is it fair of Him to say that if the message is not delivered, then that person will die? Why does God say this here?
3. Discuss in your group the rebellion of Israel. What had Israel done wrong to deserve this harsh treatment from God?

### **Personal comments by author**

*I have wondered what it would be like to receive a call like that of Ezekiel, and it is hard. To a certain extent, it is always right to try and find ways in which the stories of the Old Testament apply to our own lives and times. However, it is sometimes worth standing back and confessing that what happened was unique, and although there may be some general lessons to be learned from what happened, the details of the life of someone like Ezekiel are different. He was caught up in the life and times of Israel in Exile, and we cannot find direct parallels today. For this reason, we should perhaps not try to generalise too much from Ezekiel's personal experience of God.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Think about any time when you have been overwhelmed with God's presence, and read again the opening chapters of Ezekiel. Pray and ask the Lord to reveal something of His glory to you.*
  - *What has God called you to do, either now, or in the past, whether a specific task or a general one that is fulfilled through everything else you do?*
- 

## Final Prayer

You, Lord God, can see the world throughout time, and You know its beginning and its end. Direct our work today according to Your eternal plan, and work for the benefit of all who sincerely turn to You to do what is right. Save those who have faith in You through Jesus Christ Your Son, and bring this world to its rightful end, we pray. AMEN

---