

Prayer

The glory of Your creation, Lord God, is beyond our comprehension. For it is beautiful and full of life, yet also risky and perilous. Nevertheless, we praise You for the hope You have placed within it. For in You we find love that changes darkness to light, joy that triumphs over disaster, and hope in the midst of trial and distress. Surely You are within Your creation, Lord God, for You are leading it towards its completion in justice and in love, and we praise You. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Read a favourite passage of Scripture out loud; for example, 1 Cor 13, or Eph 1. Let these great words inspire your prayers.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for disenfranchised people throughout the world:** *Pray for the people of Africa who are sometimes badly governed and unable to enjoy the benefits of their beautiful continent*
- *Continue to pray for the people of New Zealand as they suffer the appalling results of the earthquake there. Pray for all who suffer the loss of loved ones and property*
- *Give thanks to God for teachers who give of themselves to offer good education*

Meditation

We ask for Your blessing,
Creator God of awesome majesty;
Draw near to us, examine us, remake us,
And grant us the full assurance of our faith.

We ask for Your provision,
Almighty Lord of ultimate authority;
Help us, from the storehouse of grace,
Grant us all we need to accomplish Your will.

We ask for Your presence,
Passionate Christ of Calvary and Easter.
Touch us and purify us with Your salvation;
And lead us always in the pathways of peace.

We ask for Your protection,
Powerful Spirit of wind and fire.
Gather us in Your empowering arms,
To be and to live; renewed.

Bible passage - Ezekiel 3:22-27

²² Then the hand of the LORD was upon me there; and He said to me, Rise up, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you. ²³ So I rose up and went out into the valley; and the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. ²⁴ The spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet; and He spoke with me and said to me:

Go, shut yourself inside your house. ²⁵ As for you, mortal, cords shall be placed on you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people; ²⁶ and I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be speechless and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. ²⁷ But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'.

Let those who will hear, hear; and let those who refuse to hear, refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

Bible Study

Review

The opening chapters of Ezekiel are stirring stuff! The vision of God in the first chapter is one of the most remarkable visions recorded in the Bible. Ezekiel saw the coming of God in His glory, and was then commissioned to be the Lord's prophet, in a way that offered no room for compromise. He had to 'eat' the scroll of God's words (2:8f.), and the Lord warned Ezekiel that much was at stake. If he did not deliver the prophecy then the people of Israel would die in ignorance (3:16-21).

The drama of all this is emphasised yet again in today's passage, where we hear the Lord speak to Ezekiel for a second time in a vision by the river Chebar (3:23). This time, Ezekiel was instructed to go out '*into the valley*' alongside the river Chebar (3:22), and did what was commanded. His obedience opened the way for God to say more to him, and the Spirit entered him and set him on his feet (3:24). He needed to stand up to hear what God said because when Ezekiel realised that he was in the presence of God, he did what all good Israelites were supposed to do, which was to fall down prostrate on the ground. This small moment adds to the general picture we have of how God had to work in Ezekiel; He was giving the man no option whatsoever, and the Spirit was taking him over!

The message in today's passage is quite unlike anything we have come across before in the Bible. Ezekiel's life was to be controlled by the Lord, indeed, he would not be able to speak except to prophesy! Ezekiel's whole life would be taken over by his work as a prophet in Israel, and his message would be integrated with his life in a deep and profound way. Looking back over Israel's many prophets, most of them had to deliver a message that arose from their life's experience; a prime example of this was the prophet Hosea, whose prophecy came from his marriage. Ezekiel was no different, but in his case, his whole life was to become the message!

God's first words are blunt; '*Go shut yourself inside your house!*' (3:24) As if everything Ezekiel had heard was not difficult enough, God now sent him into exile in his own home! This would only last for a short time, however, because immediately after the message in this passage, the Lord gave Ezekiel instructions about delivering a prophecy that would require him to make an exhibition of himself (4:1f.). Ezekiel was therefore unable to live a normal life; God's instructions prevented him from continuing whatever life he was living. In addition to going into his house, he was to be bound by cords to signify that he was bound to God and could not do what others did; he could not '*go out among the people*' (3:25). It is not hard to imagine how Ezekiel felt. The power of God would certainly need to be at work in anyone who received such dire instructions. Was it to compensate Ezekiel for his loss of liberty that the Lord gave him such an extraordinary vision of His glory?

Then, in a surprising and unpleasant twist to the whole story, God placed a severe restriction on Ezekiel, ensuring that he could not speak unless he had to prophesy! His tongue would stick to the roof of his mouth, and he would only be able to speak when God had something for him to say (3:26,27)! Moreover, the first words he would utter when opening his mouth would be the famous cry '*thus says the Lord God*' (3:27), the classic call of a prophet claiming the authentic message of God (e.g. Amos 1:3,6,9 etc Micah 2:3, Isaiah 7:7 etc).

What does this mean? Certainly, it was God's intention to make Ezekiel a prophet, but more than that, He made Ezekiel into a special kind of prophet. Ezekiel could do nothing apart from fulfil his calling, he was to have no other life! No doubt was permitted and no dissent sanctioned, and this would itself be a sign to the people of Israel that they must believe Ezekiel. Anything he said was a word from God!

As we read through Ezekiel's prophecies, we will find that he is a prophet of extremes. His messages are always precise and direct, even if his language is sometimes difficult to fathom and his pictures are hard to interpret. Moreover, his deeds and words are uniquely focussed to give God's message to the exiles of Israel in Babylon. They deal with the people's sin of rebellion both past and present, and they speak of God's intent to lead His people to a better place, and into His greater Glory. We still do not know much about this message, but we are now in no doubt about the seriousness of Israel's situation and the intensity of God's call on the life of Ezekiel. The stage is set for incredible things.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Ezekiel had to return to the river Chebar (1:1-3, 3:23) in order to come close to God. Do you find that you need to return to a place in order to come close to God?
2. Discuss this passage of Scripture. Is it fair of God to use a person in this way, even though we are talking about the life of someone millennia ago?
3. Is it right for us to imagine that God does something similar to some special people today, making it the case that their words are always God's Words?

Personal comments by author

Today's passage confirms my view that the prophet Ezekiel's life as a prophet is a special case, and we would should be cautious in trying to find parallels between what he was required to say and do, and what a prophet today might be called to say and do. There is ample opportunity for us to make such comparisons elsewhere in Scripture, but not in Ezekiel. I am nevertheless in awe of Ezekiel's call, and it suggests to me that whilst there are common themes within the task of prophecy, we should always seek to understand the unique nature of any individual prophetic call.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *As suggested previously, continue to keep a record of what is revealed in the prophecy of Ezekiel; what God says to Ezekiel and the prophesies he gives about Israel. This will help you keep a track on your studies of this great prophet.*
- *Pray for those who are burdened by a gift of prophecy, for many are not recognised, and those who are, are often misunderstood. Make a plan to pray regularly for God's Word to be proclaimed to His people.*

Final Prayer

Thank You, Jesus, for teaching us and for showing us the compassion of Your Father. Help us to receive Your example and do all in our power to share with others the love that has set us free and the faith we have been given. May we always seek to do Your will in even the most mundane of circumstances, and so declare Your love in word and deed. AMEN
