

## Sunday School Notes 3 November 2019: Ezekiel

When Jerusalem was finally conquered, the armies looted the palace and the temple once again, carrying off precious things. This time they took back to Babylon huge numbers of people – probably about 10 000 able bodied men and their families.

Among these was a man whom we know about through another one of the books of the Bible. His name was Ezekiel and he was a priest or minister. He doesn't seem to have been particularly important until about 5 years later, when God chose him to be a very different kind of messenger. Ezekiel was to relay messages from God to the exiles.

Many of the exiles thought that the fact that they had been taken away from Jerusalem meant that God was no longer cared about them because he was fed-up. Ezekiel was to explain that God still loved them, but that they could not simply sin against God and get away with it. When they had had time to learn their lesson, they would go back to Jerusalem. Meanwhile Ezekiel had to show them that God was with them in Babylon and that they were still his people.

Yet the book of Ezekiel tells us that Ezekiel was unable to speak for many years. God made him dumb so that he would have to act out God's messages, rather than speak them. So the book of Ezekiel contains stories of strange actions which he was told to perform in order to make people take notice.

The first thing he had to do was to make a model of the siege of Jerusalem. He drew a sketch plan of Jerusalem on a clay brick and then he used wood and clay to make ramps and battering rams and military camps round this block. A flat iron pan was leant against the model, showing it was God's iron plan to punish the city.

But that wasn't all! Ezekiel was then told to lie down next to the model, lying for 390 days on his left side (acting out how long it was before God punished the northern part of the land of Israel) and then 40 days on his right side to act out how much later God punished the southern part of the kingdom (Judah). Ezekiel was to be tied down so he could not get up! He was also only allowed to eat about one cup of multigrain bread a day and to drink only 2 cups of water, even though Babylon was hot. He was acting out that the people left in Jerusalem had very little to eat or drink!

By the end of this act, Ezekiel probably looked as gaunt and stressed as the people in Jerusalem during the siege. I imagine how people thought his actions very strange – but no-one could not have heard about the message! These disasters did not just happen – they were part of God's plan to teach his people that he was all-powerful and holy. But he was also there for them and longed for them to trust to him.

There were comforting visions as well, which Ezekiel was able to share with the people. The most famous one is in Ezekiel chapter 37 when Ezekiel was shown a valley full of dry bones. God asked him whether these bones could ever live again. Ezekiel replied that only God could know. Ezekiel was then told to speak to the bones and tell them that the Lord would send them flesh and breath. When he did so, there was a sudden rattling and the bones

were all hooked up in their correct places to form people. And when Ezekiel on God's instructions called for breath for them, they became living people. God was explaining that he was not destroying his people; he was there for them and was able to give them life if they turn to him.

This was true for the Jews – they would return to life in Jerusalem, but it is also a picture of the fact that when we accept Jesus as our Saviour he gives us a new life – we are 'born again' as new people with God's spirit in us.

So here is another suffering prophet, faithfully relaying God's messages to God's people. We mustn't just think of the new life, we must also remember that God makes demands of us and we be careful to live as God wants us to do.