

Life Lesson 105
The Prophet Ezekiel
Text: Ezekiel

Introduction

The third of the major prophets is the prophet Ezekiel. The first two, Isaiah and Jeremiah, were prophets before the time the Babylonians took the children of Israel into captivity. Jeremiah, we learned last week, was the main prophet when the final defeat came. Ezekiel, however, was the first of the prophets to the Israelites in captivity.

The Story

Can you imagine how difficult it would be to suddenly be taken away from your home and all your possessions and carried away as a slave in a foreign land? It must have been so hard for Israelites! They went from being respected craftsmen and leaders to being lowly slaves.

God had a purpose, though, in all these terrible things. The people had been wicked. These hard things were sent to bring them away from their sin and back to their God. That was the main part of Ezekiel's ministry – urging the people to turn their hurts back to the Lord.

It looks like, after so many hardships, that the people would have seen the need to repent. There were other prophets, though, that helped keep them mixed up and away from the Lord.

“This horrible captivity will soon be over,” the false prophets told the people. “We will defeat these Babylonians and they will soon be serving us.”

Ezekiel's message was not so popular.

“It was your sins that brought on these punishments,” Ezekiel proclaimed. “Because you are not repenting, you will suffer for a long time.”

The people did not want to hear that at all – and they tried to ignore Ezekiel and his messages. God gave him some illustrations that were hard to ignore!

He had Ezekiel build a model city like Jerusalem on a tile. He told Ezekiel to lie down on his side with an iron pan between his face and the model city. He was to lie there one day for every year the Israelites would serve in captivity.

Day after day, the people had to walk past Ezekiel who was lying there on his side with a pan before his face. They could not escape the reminder that God was hiding His face from their troubles because of their great sin. Each day they must have wondered if Ezekiel would still be here – if yet another year was to be tallied up. For 390 days Ezekiel lay there, tied up and with his face hidden by the iron pan.

Another picture-sermon the Lord directed Ezekiel to do used Ezekiel's hair. God told him to cut off his hair and beard and divide it into three piles. One pile he was to burn before the people. Another part was to be cut up with a knife, and another third was to be tossed out for the wind to be carried away. Ezekiel was to hide just a few hairs in his robe.

This strange picture meant that some of the Israelites perished when Jerusalem burned. Others were killed in battle, and still others were carried away as captives. The hairs that were in his robe were to show that God had kept a few people for Himself. Though the Jews were wicked and were to be punished, God remembered His promise and kept some safe. The Messiah, Jesus, would come from that remnant. Remnant means “leftover piece.” God made sure that not all His people were destroyed, but there was always people left.

God gave Ezekiel visions, too. He saw the same six-winged creature that Isaiah had seen. In another vision he saw something very strange. God took Ezekiel to a great valley. Ezekiel

looked down and saw a horrible sight. The valley was full of bones! They were old dry bones, like those of people who died long, long ago.

“Son of man, can these bones live again?” God asked Ezekiel.

“You know, that, Lord,” Ezekiel replied.

“Preach to the bones,” God told him.

What a strange thing to do! Can old dead people hear anything? But, Ezekiel obeyed God and preached to the bones in the valley.

While he was preaching, he heard the sound of thunder rolling. The bones from all over the valley jumped up and began joining up with other bones. Soon there were no loose bones at all, but a valley full of skeletons. Then another change happened. The skeletons grew flesh and then hair. Now the valley was full of dead bodies, like soldiers who had been killed in battle.

“Now call on the four winds,” God told Ezekiel. “Tell them to breathe on these dead people that they may live.”

Ezekiel did as God commanded. The winds came and blew on the dead bodies and the bodies came to life. The dead people got up and Ezekiel saw they were soldiers, alive and strong, ready for battle.

“These are the people of Israel,” God told Ezekiel. “They seem to be dead and defeated and have no hope. But I will breathe life back into them and make them strong again. They will go back to their land and be a people once more. I am God, and I have spoken it.”

When Ezekiel told the people about this vision, they were glad to hear it! They were encouraged to know that there was hope for them.

The Life Lesson

Ezekiel had many other adventures, but we can tell from these things that he had an interesting life. It wasn't easy, because he often had to tell people things they didn't want to hear. It also couldn't have been fun being tied up before a fire with a pan in front of his face!

But Ezekiel obeyed God and encouraged God's people. We can see from the book of Ezekiel that God doesn't put up with sin. He is patient, but the day will come when judgment must come. It is good to know, though, that God always gives hope. Just as the dry bones came together and became alive, we know that God can save the hardest heart and can make the most impossible situation turn out for good. He is a great and wonderful God!

Review Questions

To what group of people did Ezekiel preach?

The Israelites in captivity.

Did they like to hear Ezekiel's message?

No.

What did God tell Ezekiel to do to show the people how long they would be in captivity?

He lay, bound up, before a model city of Jerusalem. He had a pan between his face and the city. He had to lie there one day for every year the people were held as slaves.

What was in Ezekiel's vision?

He saw a valley full of loose, dry bones.

What did God tell Ezekiel to do to the bones?

Preach to them.

What happened to the bones when he preached?

They joined together, grew flesh and hair and looked like dead bodies.

What happened when Ezekiel did as God said and called on the four winds to come to them?

The bodies came alive.

What did the vision mean?

That the people of Israel were divided and dead like dry bones, but that God could rescue them and give them new life as a nation

What do the dry bones mean to you?

That God can take a sinner, dead in sins, and save him and give him new life.