

## PROPHET EZEKIEL

With Jerusalem in ashes, the main focus of Jewish history shifted to Babylon. After the initial shock of exile wore off, the Jews began to adjust to their new situation. Ezekiel was born and had grown up in Jerusalem. After the first Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, he was deported to Babylon in 597 BC. He was a priest and at the age of 30, in exile, he was granted a special vision of God and called to be a prophet. ***Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. (Ezekiel 3:1-4).*** Ezekiel saw himself particularly as a watchman or a lookout (Ezekiel 3:17, 33:7). Just as a lookout would warn of the advances of enemy forces and give his own army time to take action, Ezekiel warned his fellow Jews that God's judgment was coming. He offered them the chance to turn and accept the way of escape that God had provided. The first half of his book contains the messages he gave to the people before the final destruction of Jerusalem.

### Message of comfort

After they heard of the fall of Jerusalem, many of the exiles became deeply depressed. All hope for their future seemed to have vanished. Every city in their homeland was in ruins. This was the time when Ezekiel's messages changed in tone and brought far more comfort and encouragement. Yaweh was still the same powerful, just and caring God that he had always been (Ezekiel 36:23). If each one of the exiles would repent and make his or her own choice to serve God and keep on serving him then, as Jeremiah had promised, they could join the new community that God was going to create from the old. They could be absolutely certain that God would take them back to Jerusalem and provide a new life there (Ezekiel 36:35-36).

### Ezekiel's vision

Ezekiel told the people one of his visions. He had seen a valley filled with thousands and thousands of human bones, completely dried out and whitening in the hot sun. The whole place had an atmosphere of utter desolation (Ezekiel 37:1-2). Then as Ezekiel watch in awe and horror, the bones began to move about, they joined together into skeletons and were covered over first with muscles and flesh and then with skin. Finally, the dead bodies came to life and the valley of death was filled with living men (Ezekiel 37:7-10). This strange experience was a means of explaining to the exiles that although the Jewish nation was virtually dead and dried up like the bones in the vision, God still had the power to restore that nation to a completely new life (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

### Ezekiel prophesied the restoration of the Temple

Since the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, the Jews in exile found themselves totally forsaken by God – they had nowhere to offer sacrifices. It was at this time a new prayer-house emerged – the SYNAGOGUE. Because they had no temple, the Jews met in synagogues, but not for

offering sacrifices, since sacrifices could only be offered in the Temple. In the synagogues the Jews met for prayer and reading of the scriptures, generally on the Sabbath and feast days. They longed for the day when they would get an opportunity to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The synagogue would only be a temporary reminder of God; Ezekiel told the people that he saw a vision in which he found the temple filled once again with the glory of God. As a result, there were many Jews who longed to get back to Jerusalem, while quite a few were happy with their settled life in Babylon.

The most serious thing about the exile was not the suffering it brings to human beings but that the people's sin caused the glory of God to quit the Temple. Hence, the goal of the restoration is a community gathered around the restored Temple – a people who are bound to God with a renewed covenant. The reason for this is that God is holy and because of his holiness, he will continue to be the savior of the people.

### **Reflection:**

1. What is the message God is giving us today, through the vision of Ezekiel? Are there many people who could be considered as 'exiles'? Think of the many refugees in the world. Pray for them.
2. Ask God to help you to trust Him when you wait in hope for something. Reflect on the words of the hymn "IN HIS TIME".

In His time, in His time  
He makes all things beautiful in His time  
Lord, please show me ev'ryday  
As you're teaching me your way  
That you do just what You say in Your time.

In Your time, in Your time  
You make all things beautiful in Your time  
Lord, my life to You I bring  
May each song I have to sing  
Be to You a lovely thing in Your time.

There's a time, there's a time  
Both for sowing and for reaping there's a time  
Time for losing, time for gain  
Time for joy and time for pain  
Every purpose under heaven has a time.

There are times, there are days  
Weeks and months we cannot understand God's ways  
If for years we fail to scan  
What is His eternal plan  
We'll remember that he can, all the time.