

EZEKIEL

FOR HIS GLORY

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**49 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL**

Have you ever been far from home? How did you feel?

As the book of Ezekiel opens we find that a group of Israelites have been exiled from home (v. 1). The might of the Babylonian army had attacked Jerusalem in 598 BC and forcibly deported the elite, the leaders. We're told that King Nebuchadnezzar dragged away the king and his family, the palace officials, the fighting men, the craftsmen and metalworkers: that is, all the people most useful to build the Babylonian Empire (see 2 Kgs 24:10–16). Removing them also removed the threat of an uprising. Ezekiel was among those banished, and as the word of the LORD comes to him, the exiles had been away from home for five years (v. 2). How do you think they would have felt?

Psalm 137 captures some of their emotions.

***¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. ...
³ there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' ⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?***

So the exiles were in despair. They were far away from their temple and their land. They were probably wondering, 'Has our God, the LORD, been defeated by the Babylonian gods?' And they were also probably anxiously thinking, 'Has God abandoned us?' We'll see God's response to these types of questions in the next devotion.

For now, also spare a thought for Ezekiel. Since he came from a family of priests, for all his life he'd been groomed to follow in his father's footsteps (vv. 1-3). The usual age to begin priestly duties was thirty years old (cf. Num. 4:3). But when Ezekiel turned thirty, instead of beginning ministry as a priest, God calls him to be a prophet, His mouthpiece. How will Ezekiel respond? More importantly, how will the exiles respond to God's word spoken to them through the prophet? We'll find out as we study the book of Ezekiel together.

What a spectacular opening to the book of Ezekiel! Thunderbolts and lightning; very, very frightening creatures. By the Kebar Canal in Babylon Ezekiel finds himself swept up in a weirdly wonderful vision.

What Ezekiel sees in the vision is God's glory, with three main parts:

- 1. A windstorm and four living creatures (vv. 1–14).** The cloud, lightning and fire in the windstorm are reminiscent of God's presence. This windstorm comes from the north (v. 4), the traditional direction from which Israel's enemies attacked. The creatures are almost grotesque. There are four creatures with four faces each (v. 10), probably representing the apex of each type of creature.
- 2. Wheels beneath the creatures (vv. 15–21).** The wheels are within wheels and are studded with eyes.
- 3. An expanse and a throne above the creatures (vv. 22–28).** On the far side of the expanse Ezekiel sees a magnificently bright 'figure like that of a man' (v. 26) on the throne.

What are we to make of this riot of images? Ezekiel tells us that this was 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD' (v. 28). The prophet's description of the vision is cluttered and clumsy, because he can't put down in words what he saw. And his final conclusion is vague because, as someone with a priestly background, he just can't come out and say, 'I saw God.' He knows that he can't see God and live (Exod. 33:20). Yet God does reveal something of Himself to Ezekiel by showing limited aspects of His glorious character:

- 1. He is different.** The things in the vision are way beyond anything Ezekiel or we have experienced.
- 2. He is King of the universe.** He is seated on His mobile throne chariot, able to move anywhere, able to see everything.
- 3. He will judge.** God comes from the north to judge His people.

REFLECTION

Do you respond to Jesus, God's ultimate revelation of His glory (e.g. John 1:14), with wholehearted worship, like Ezekiel (v. 28)?