

## **Bi235 Old Testament 2**

### ***Lesson Bi235-39 Ezekiel's Visions***

A young priest named Ezekiel was taken from Judah to Babylon about the same time as Daniel. The king of Judah was taken as well, and another descendant of David was put on the throne. He was forced to do whatever the king of Babylon commanded.

Hundreds of refugees from Judah settled in Babylonian towns. Most of them believed that Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple would not be destroyed. They believed that God would preserve the city and the temple. They said, "God rescued the city 100 years ago, when Assyria attacked; God will save the city again."

Many prophets, however, had predicted the downfall of Judah. Even the early prophets Micah and Isaiah predicted that Judah would be taken captive into Babylon. Not only would Judah be conquered, but according to Jeremiah, Jerusalem and the temple itself would be destroyed. He stood up in the courtyard of the temple and said, "This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law...and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets ... then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city a curse among all the nations of the earth" (Jer 26:6). For centuries Shiloh had been the religious center of worship for the Israelite tribes, but God had allowed its destruction.

So Ezekiel began to minister to the Judean refugees in the towns of Babylon. God told him that there was no hope for Jerusalem. The city and the temple would be destroyed because of the nation's sinfulness. Ezekiel tried to get his fellow exiles to give up their false hopes for Jerusalem. He believed that they should all accept God's judgment on their homeland.

Ezekiel communicated God's message in a variety of ways. He sometimes acted out the message, rather than speaking it. Once he drew a picture of Jerusalem on a clay tablet. Then he drew siege-works and ramps against the city walls. This drawing showed that armies were besieging Jerusalem.

Another time he shaved his head and his beard. Then he arranged the hairs in three piles. He did this in public so the Judean exiles could watch him. One of the piles of hair he burned. The second pile of hair he chopped up with a knife. The third pile he threw up in the air, and the wind blew it away. This action was a symbol of ancient warfare. Armies would run into a town and kill everyone they found. Then they would burn it to kill people still hiding in the buildings. Finally, anyone else ran away.

For nine years Ezekiel's messages attacked the false hopes of the exiles. They had not believed previous prophecies, and they didn't believe Ezekiel either. Their hope was not simply love for their homeland. Instead, they were denying that God had the right to punish Judah's sinfulness. They didn't take God's message seriously. They didn't think Ezekiel was telling the truth. They were practicing sin before they were captured, and in Babylon they were still practicing their sins. They paid no attention to Jewish dietary laws; they worshiped idols and the stars. They committed adultery and did other detestable things.

Nine years passed and news arrived in Babylon that armies were besieging Jerusalem. Three years later the city fell and the temple was destroyed. God said to Ezekiel, "I will make the land a

desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done” (Ezek 33:28-29).

The exiles finally learned about the destruction of Judah. They realized that their hopes for their homeland were false hopes. They became sad and depressed. They admitted that their ancestors had sinned and offended God. They themselves had sinned, as well, and God was punishing them. They believed that God’s covenant love for them had come to an end. They had no hope for the future.

After God allowed Judah to be destroyed, his messages to Ezekiel began to change. Instead of preaching against the false hopes of the exiled Judeans, he began to offer hopeful messages. The people were deeply discouraged; they needed encouragement. They were quoting a proverb, “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezek 18:2). This meant that God was punishing them for the sins of Israelites in the past. There was no escaping God’s anger.

Ezekiel taught against this kind of thinking: “The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them. ... Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Ezek 18:20, 23)

God reminded them of his promises of restoration. “I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.... The trees will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land” (Ezek 34:26-27). Ezekiel saw a powerful vision of this restoration.

He saw a valley full of dry human bones. God asked him, “Can these bones come alive again?” The LORD told Ezekiel to say to the bones: “I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ... Then you will know that I am the LORD.” Suddenly there was a noise—a rattling sound. The bones came together, flesh and tendons appeared on them, and skin covered them. Ezekiel was amazed. They came to life and stood on their feet—a vast army of people.

Then God said to him, “These bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, ‘Our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ But this is what I say, ‘My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.... I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it’” (Ezek 37:3-14).

God is looking for a change of our hearts. God promised Ezekiel, “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them. I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. They will be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19). David prayed, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:10). Jesus repeated Moses’s great commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37).

This story is **important** because it shows us that God continued to send prophets to the people of Judah, even after he punished the nation for its sinfulness. Years earlier, he promised that he would preserve a remnant of Israel. This remnant would be the people who remained faithful to him. God used Ezekiel to inspire the exiles to repent and to become this faithful remnant.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God punished the northern and southern kingdoms for their sinfulness. Beyond the experiences of deportation and loss of their homeland, the people of Israel were still encouraged to repent of their sins and receive the forgiveness of God.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What was the religious problem of the exiles in Babylon? [Pause]  
A. If you said, "They didn't take God seriously when he threatened punishment if they didn't repent, and they believed that Jerusalem and the temple would not be destroyed," you are correct.
2. For nine years, what was Ezekiel's message to the exiles? [Pause]  
A. If you answered, "He tried to persuade the exiles to give up their false hopes for Jerusalem, and to accept God's judgment," you answered correctly.
3. How did Ezekiel's message change after the fall of Jerusalem? [Pause]  
A. If you said, "He began to remind the people that God had a wonderful future for them if they would repent and serve him wholeheartedly," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell someone else the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and re-tell it until you feel sure you are repeating the words and actions correctly.

Sometimes people today feel like God is not noticing their sin, because their lives are going smoothly. They have perhaps become comfortable with wrongdoing. Ask yourself, "Does God really mean what he says about hating sin? When will people be called to account for their sins?" Share this story about Ezekiel and the exiles with friends and neighbors. Pray with them to examine their hearts and repent of their sins.