

My name is Ezekiel. I was called one of the great prophets of Israel. Whether or not I was a great prophet, you will have to decide for yourselves. The fact is, I did not choose to be a prophet. If I had known what was in store for me, I would probably have done what Jonah did when the Lord called him to preach to Nineveh—I would have run away in the opposite direction.

One day, the Great Yahweh came to me and said: "Ezekiel, I have chosen you to be a watchman over Israel," and that was that! I was a prophet, and I had no choice.

My name means "God will strengthen." Little did I know how much strength from God I would need just to bear the message God would give me. You see, I was not only to give the message. I was to be that message! I was the object lesson of the Lord. The Lord had a message of judgment to speak to the inhabitants of Judah as to how they were to suffer, and my unique job as a prophet was not only to speak that message, but to suffer it right before their eyes.

Let me tell you how it happened. The Holy Land consisted of 12 tribes of Israel. After the death of David and Solomon, those 12 tribes split into the northern and southern kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom had 10 tribes, and was called "Israel." The Southern Kingdom was the tribes of Judah and Simeon, and was called "Judah." In the year 721 B.C. the Lord made an end of the Northern Kingdom because they became so terribly wicked, and not even the great prophets whom the Lord sent to them could stem the tide of evil. The Southern Kingdom lasted another 140 years. They had some great kings down there for a while—and some great prophets to whom the people listened. But the Southern Kingdom also became terribly wicked and left the Lord for other gods, so the Lord made an end to them also in the year 586 B.C., when the Chaldeans came down from Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.

Well, 20 years before Nebuchadnezzar made a complete end to them, he came down to Judah with his armies and took some captives with him to Babylon. He took the choicest young men, among whom was Daniel. Then, nine years later, in 597 B.C., he came back with his army and took some more of us captive, and I was among these later captives. We were not really slaves, because we had much freedom, and we were given our own land and flocks, but we were still exiles away from home. Nebuchadnezzar just wanted some of us up there to work the land. We Jews were together there in one place, and I was their priest. My friend Jeremiah was left in Jerusalem and was called by God to be the prophet there in Judah, while I was called to be the prophet and priest among the exiles in Chaldea. I have already complained about being a prophet in Chaldea among the exiles, but the job Jeremiah was given to do was much harder. After I had been in Chaldea for five years, I was standing by the river Chebar when suddenly a great wind came out of the north, and a great

cloud with fire and lightning were flashing out of it as in a storm. It looked as if it were gleaming bronze! This was in July of 592 B.C. As I watched in wonder, four living creatures came forth towards me, each having the form of a man, but they were not men. They each had four wings, and as they walked, they did not turn right or left but walked straight ahead. They each had four faces. In the front, their face was the face of a man; to the right their face was the face of a lion; to the left the face of an ox; and in the back, the face of an eagle. Their feet were not human feet, but like calves' feet. You can imagine my fear as they were walking towards me. Then I saw four wheels, one each by the living creatures. Actually, those four wheels were like wheels within wheels that could move in any direction, although they did not turn. Each wheel was covered with eyes inside and out and around, looking in every direction. Covering this entire scene was a firmament, like a rainbow, shining like crystal, and above the firmament, One seated who looked like a man. When He appeared, the living creatures flattened their wings down on the ground, and they knelt there. And He spoke to me! Of course, I knelt too. Actually, I didn't really kneel. I fell down on my face. What could I do? There wasn't anything else I could do. What would you have done?

Then He spoke to me: "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you." I immediately stood, and He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to be a prophet to My people. They are a rebellious people, impudent and stubborn. You shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord. Whether they hear or refuse to hear—for they are a rebellious people—they will at least know there has been a prophet among them. Do not be afraid of them,' He said, 'but speak what I tell you to speak. Son of man, hear what I say to you, and be not as that rebellious house to whom I send you.' Out of that terrifying vision, a hand came forth and gave me a scroll with writing on it, both in front and back. As I read the scroll, I discovered it was filled with lamentation and mourning and woe. The voice spoke to me again: 'Son of man, eat what is offered to you, and digest it, and then speak it to the house of Israel.' I did as I was told. I ate that scroll. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when it reached my stomach it was bitter as gall, and I wanted to vomit it up but I could not, and it burned within me! When the vision left me, I sat by the Chebar river among the exiles for seven days, overwhelmed!

After those seven days, the Lord came to me again. It was time for my prophecy to begin, but it was not preaching I was to do. Yet, in a sense, it was. I was to be an object lesson. I was told in my vision to lay a brick on the ground and build a miniature siege work about it with iron and ditches. I was in such a way to prophesy against Jerusalem, for such a siege was to lay them waste. The Lord told me He would put invisible cords upon me so I could not move. I was to lie on my left side for 390 days, without moving, in front of that brick. Then I was allowed to turn over on my right side for 40 days more. Each day was to

represent a year. Three hundred and ninety years of exile and punishment for Israel, 40 years for Judah. I was their object lesson. I was to suffer their exile! It was my job as prophet to the exiles. My food for that year and seventy days was to be the barest necessities, and I'm not even going to tell you how it was cooked! You can readily see what my message was to be. Perhaps they would not listen to me, but at least they knew that the Lord had sent a prophet among them. That began in July, 592 B.C.

Then in September, 591 B.C., the Lord came to me again. He took me, in a vision, to Jerusalem. It was nice to be home again, even if it was only in a vision. It was even more pleasant for me when He took me to the temple where I had been with the other priests as I was being trained for the priesthood. It was so nice to be there again. But my pleasure soon turned to bitterness. That One, like the Son of Man, whom I had seen in my earlier vision, came to me and took me by a lock of my hair and lifted me above the temple, and He said to me: "Look over there by the north gate and tell Me what you see." I looked, and there I saw outside the north gate the vision again that I had seen earlier of the four living creatures, and the wheels, and the rainbow. I was totally unprepared for that! I understood what had happened even before the Lord told me. "See what they have done," He said. "They have put Me outside My own temple!" It was true! They had expelled the Lord from His own temple! How could it have happened? It soon became clear to me as the Lord took me inside the temple. I was astounded at what I saw there! I saw 25 men in that temple looking to the east and bowing down and worshipping the sun! In God's own temple! I don't know how I could have handled more, but more was shown to me.

I will spare you the details, but let's just say that the priests themselves were desecrating the Temple of the Lord. But I was not finished with my prophesying—not yet finished.

The Lord told me that everyone in exile would come and listen to me because they knew there was a prophet among them. It was true. They would come and sit before me because they knew I was a prophet. But the Lord was also right when He told me that they would listen to me as they would listen to a singer of love songs, for they will listen to what you say, but they will not do it, He said. But at least they knew there was a prophet among them. The Lord never leaves His people without a witness. I spoke much to them about their restoration, telling them they would come back from captivity. It gave me the chance to talk to them about your Christ when He would restore the kingdom of David in the latter days, never to fail again under that Christ. I told them about the valley of the dry bones when they would be put back together again. But there is one vision I especially want to share with you. It was very close to the end of my life, and those who had survived the 1½ years of siege in Jerusalem were with me in Chaldea. I repeated to these new exiles what the Lord had told me, that one day they or their children would return to their beloved land.

I told them they would never again worship an idol because they would never want to. I was able to assure them of that because of the amazing thing the Lord said to me. "These people," He said, "will never again defile My name and make Me ashamed to call them My own in the latter days. These people have defiled My name everywhere. When I gave them My land, they defiled My land. When I sent them into bondage and scattered them over the face of the earth, they defiled My name everywhere they went. But never again will they do that! I will see to it that they will never again do that!! Not because of them, but because of My name. I must protect My name, and therefore I am about to act—not for the house of Israel, but to protect My name on the earth. I will make all the nations of the earth know that I am the Lord God, who is holy, and I will do it through My people. Therefore I will take My people, who are scattered throughout the earth in those latter days, and give them back their land. I will cleanse them and put a new heart and a new spirit within them. I will again make them great, and they will never again suffer disgrace. But let it be known to you that it is not for your sake, but for Mine!"

He continued: "I made promises to you that the whole world knows I made, and I will fulfill My promises even though you defiled My name everywhere you went. I made promises and I will keep them—not because of you, but to protect My name! I have a reputation to uphold on the earth!" "Here is what I will do to accomplish this," He said. "I will be so good to you that it will shame you, for you will remember how you sinned against Me. I will give you every good thing. I will protect you. I will feed you and clothe you and increase your flocks. I will forgive your sins. I will love you and shower you with gifts until you cannot contain it all, and then I will give you more until you cannot bear it—until you love Me! Then My name will be vindicated.

Are you aware that the Lord God Yahweh did that for you in Christ?

Are you interested in what happened to me? Let me tell you. When the rest of the exiles came up to Chaldea from Jerusalem, they heard what I had said in my prophecies about them, and do you know what they did? They killed me! My own people killed me! Later they said what a great prophet Ezekiel was, but my own generation killed me. What is it about prophets that people cannot stand? I loved those people. All I wanted to do was serve them. I prayed for them. I pleaded with them. I hated the message I had to give them, and believe me, I would have died for them. But they killed me! What is it about prophets in their own generation that people cannot stand?