

# *The Questor*

## *God's Messengers....*

### *.... Ezekiel*

In 597 BC, Ezekiel was in his mid twenties and training to be a priest as his father had been before him. But his dreams of being a priest ended that year when King Jehoiachin surrendered Jerusalem to the invading Babylonian army and Ezekiel was taken into exile along with countless others. It's interesting that he may have known Jeremiah who was prophesying in Jerusalem when Ezekiel was a teenager. Also he was a contemporary of Daniel: they were both in exile at the same time although they followed different paths.

You can imagine his devastation at seeing his aspirations thwarted. But a few years later, when he was thirty all that changed when, one day, he was on the banks of the River Kebar (in modern day Iraq) and he had an amazing vision. He describes the vision in quite apocalyptic terms which are similar to how Daniel spoke of his visions and John about his, later. But the essence of the vision was that he saw God in all his awesome majesty. It was a vision of dazzling brilliance; of fire and glory. It was in this vision that God told Ezekiel to take a message to the hard-hearted difficult Jews.

Remember that it was because the Jews had turned their backs on God and followed their own way that God had allowed them to be taken into exile in the first place. So these people who had no time for God before now felt more disconnected from him than ever. There was a mixture of denial and despair. Those in denial were unwilling to see the truth behind their situation. Those in despair just focussed on what they had lost and felt that life wasn't worth living. A tough audience for Ezekiel.

At this point it's important to remember also that, after the invasion of Jerusalem, the Babylonians put a puppet king, Zedekiah, on the throne to run Judah as a kind of vassal state. At that time, Jerusalem was left intact as a city and

the Temple remained as it had been since the time of King Solomon. But the people who were left behind after the exile still didn't change their ways. In the eyes of God they were doing detestable things and this was the subject of Ezekiel's early prophecy.

He prophesied that Babylon would again lay siege to Jerusalem and that it would be destroyed; and that's exactly what happened. Zedekiah broke the agreement he had with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and that led to a siege that started in 588BC. The impact of the siege was horrendous with some mothers killing their children and eating them because they were so hungry. Eventually the Babylonian forces broke in and trashed the city, breaking down the city walls and looting and destroying the Temple.

At this point the Jews in exile hit rock bottom. It was as though their identity as a nation had been erased. If they ever escaped from Babylon, there was nothing to go back to. They were bereft.

It was largely down to people like Ezekiel that the people were encouraged to lift up their heads and see that this wasn't the end of the road; that God had a plan for their redemption. More about that next month.

In the meantime it's worth sparing a thought for our western 'Christian' society. How does God see us? Given the corruption, violence, decadence and lack of regard for him, might he turn his back on us and allow one of the emerging powers in our world to 'take us into exile'?

Such a thought shouldn't be lightly dismissed. But neither should the fact that our heavenly father is a God of love who is always looking for an opportunity to restore relationships. There's always a way back if we choose to take it.