

By Bessie Wilbon

Sunday School Lesson



INTRODUCTION

There is something about a gently flowing stream that helps to quiet the troubled soul. Thoughts of bitterness and despair may be welling up from within; one may believe that he has the burdens of the world resting upon him; but the gently flowing waters seem to say, "This too will pass away."

Anyone who has stood by the water's edge to ponder these things can identify, in a measure, with the prophet Ezekiel. He had reached the stage of young manhood, that period in life when one's hopes and aspirations should begin to be realized. But any plans he may have had for life had been shattered. Taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, he was now hundreds of miles from home, a displaced person, in a strange land among strange people. Five years had gone by without any word of hope for himself from his fellow exiles. Now the prophet was by the stream, and there the things he recorded in his book began to happen.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Nothing is recorded of the fast five years of Ezekiel's exile, but they must have been a time of considerable soul-searching and adjustment. But the exiles had not been abandoned by God. Ezekiel was given a vision of the glory of the Lord and was called to be a prophet. Ezekiel's first prophecies were warnings of the judgment that was yet to fall on Jerusalem. After the fall of the city, Ezekiel spoke more directly to his fellow exiles, relating much about the restoration of Israel and the coming reign of the Davidic Messiah.

THE LESSON

"When I saw this, I fell face downward on the ground. Then I heard a voice saying, 'Mortal man, stand up. I want to talk to you.' While the voice was speaking, God's spirit entered me and raised me up to my feet and I heard the voice continue, 'Mortal man, I'm sending you to the people of Israel. They have rebelled and turned against me and are still rebels, just as their ancestors were. They are stubborn and do not respect me, so I am sending you to tell them what I, the Sovereign Lord, am saying to them. Whether those rebels listen to you or not, they will know that a prophet has been among them. But you, mortal man, must not be afraid of them or anything they say. They will defy and despise you; it will be like living among scorpions. Still, don't be afraid of those rebels or of anything they say. You will tell them whatever I tell you to say, whether they listen or not. Remember what rebels they are. Mortal man, listen to what I tell you. Don't be rebellious like them. Open your mouth and eat what I am going to give you.' I saw a hand reaching out toward me, and it was holding a scroll. The hand unrolled the scroll, and I saw that there was writing on both sides - cries of grief were written there, and walls and groans. God said, 'Mortal man, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.'" (Ezekiel 2:1-10; 3:1)

The vision granted to Ezekiel was not simply to afford him a moment of spiritual delight, and certainly it was not to give him cause for boasting. Rather it was to prepare him for service in the work of the Lord. He was to be empowered and commissioned for active duty.

The vision given to Ezekiel was most unusual. There was a whirlwind out of the north and four living creatures, each with four faces and four wings. There were wheels, the rims of which were full of eyes, so the creature could see all and could travel in any direction. High above was a throne, with what appeared to be a man on it. Apparently, what the prophet saw was really indescribable, yet it revealed in an awe-inspiring way something of the greatness and the glory of God. Ezekiel was overwhelmed and fell upon his face. Then he heard a voice.

God's servant must not have any misconceptions of the nature of his task. Ezekiel was not told that it would be easy. In fact, his mission was to people rebellious against God. It is never easy to be dedicated wholly to God's way of righteousness.

Ezekiel was not to deliver a message of his own devising, but one committed to him directly by the Lord. And as one who was hungry for the Word, he must eat it, thus making it an integral part of himself. As a messenger of the Lord, he must be true to the Word that was given him. Ezekiel was not to be selective of certain portions of the scroll, exclusive of others. The message of God in its entirety was to be received and transmitted. In preparation for his task, he must thoroughly digest the Word - "fill your stomach with it."

The task to which Ezekiel was being called was not especially easy or pleasant. A time would come when he would have a message of hope from God. But first he must make it clear that the sin of Israel would not go unpunished. His was the task of the watchman who sounds the alarm. If "lamentations, mourning, and woe" were in store for his people, at least the scroll had brought them warning. Thus Ezekiel could say it was in my mouth as honey.

Ezekiel was aware that he was sent of God. He was given no assurance that he would be successful but he could be and he would be faithful in delivering the message entrusted to him. We are debtors to Ezekiel because of his faithfulness. But what of our faithfulness to God? We have this message in its fullness, a message that the world must hear if it is not to suffer destruction. What is our response to God's call?



Rev. H.S. Diggs
...Mayfield pastor

Men Of Mayfield

Continued From Page 1A
Jule Huntley, Mayfield's Man of the Year for 1985, will serve as chairperson for the day and he will also deliver the 6 p.m. Worship Service address.

The public is expressly invited to all services.

Mayfield Memorial Baptist Church is located at 700 Sugar Creek Rd. West. Rev. H.S. Diggs is pastor.

Flowe-Barringer

Reunion

The Flowe-Barringer reunion will be held Saturday, July 12, at Freedom Park. The reunion begins at 1 p.m.

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NCBLC Hosts Anniversary Conference

The North Carolina Black Leadership Caucus will be hosting its 10th anniversary conference here on July 18-20.

Three sites have been chosen to be the locations of the conference, University Park Baptist Church, Johnson C. Smith University, and the Charlotte Marriott City Center.

The theme chosen for the three-day conference is "Economic and Political Self-help." When the conference opens on Friday, July 18, Congressman Walter Fauntroy and Rev. Jesse Jackson will be present at the opening general session. This session begins at 6:30 p.m. and will take place at University Park Baptist

Church. The public is invited to this event.

On July 19, prayer breakfast will be held at 8 a.m. at Johnson C. Smith University. Later that morning Dr. Joseph Lowery, president of SCLC, Dr. Benjamin Chavis, executive director of the commission for Racial Justice and Lezli Baskerville, executive director of the National Black Leadership Roundtable, will be the guest speakers, as well as Dr. Linda Williams, senior research associate of the Joint Center for Political Studies.

Beginning at noon Tony Brown will speak at the luncheon. Scheduled to speak at 3 p.m. are Congress-

man Parren Mitchell, Joshua Smith, president and CEO, The Maxima Corporation, and Arthur Teel Jr., president and CEO, National Business League.

Congressman Charles Rangel will be the keynote speaker at the conference banquet at 6 p.m.

And on Sunday, July 20, Congresswoman Cardiss Collins addresses the breakfast session. The events at the luncheon banquet and Sunday breakfast session will take place at the Marriott City Center.

Registration for the conference will take place at University Memorial Union at Johnson C. Smith. On Saturday, July 18, at 4 p.m.

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