BOOKLET TO PRINT

The Prophet Ezekiel

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: April 10

IN BRIEF

The Prophet Ezekiel

Priest of Jerusalem deported to Babylon in the sixth century BC, prophet of the exile, of the glory of God and of the new heart.

Feast day	April 10
Era	6th century BC

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

The Prophet Ezekiel

Ezekiel is one of the four major prophets of the Old Testament. A priest of Jerusalem, he was deported to Babylon in 597 BC with King Jehoiachin and part of the people. There, by the river Chebar, he received his call in a tremendous vision of the glory of God. He first announced the fall of Jerusalem; then, when the city was destroyed, he became the prophet of hope: God would give his people "a new heart" and bring the dry bones back to life. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on April 10.

Who was the prophet Ezekiel?

Ezekiel is known through the book that bears his name, one of the longest and most striking in the Bible. The son of the priest Buzi, he lived in exile at Tel-abib, a settlement of Jewish deportees near Babylon, with his wife, who died during his ministry. His name means "God strengthens." A visionary, he used many symbolic actions to make his message understood by a discouraged people. He is the prophet of the glory of God, of personal responsibility and of the resurrection of Israel.

Key dates

- **c. 622 BC**: Born into a priestly family of Jerusalem.
- **597 BC**: Deported to Babylon with King Jehoiachin, at Nebuchadnezzar's first capture of Jerusalem.
- **593 BC**: Vision of the chariot of God's glory by the river Chebar and call to be a prophet.
- **587 BC**: Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which his prophecies had foretold.

- **After 587**: He announces the return from exile, the people's resurrection and a new heart.
- **573 BC**: Vision of a new Temple from which a river of life flows.

The vision of God's chariot

In the fifth year of the exile, by the river Chebar, Ezekiel saw a storm wind coming from the north and a cloud of fire. In its midst appeared four living creatures, each with four faces, of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle, and gleaming wheels "full of eyes." Above them, on a sapphire throne, was a human form surrounded by light: "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:28). Ezekiel fell on his face.

Christian tradition saw in these four faces the symbols of the four evangelists: the man for Saint Matthew, the lion for Saint Mark, the ox for Saint Luke and the eagle for Saint John. They are carved on cathedral portals around Christ in glory.

The prophet as watchman

God gave Ezekiel a scroll covered with "lamentation, wailing and woe" and told him to eat it: in his mouth it became "sweet as honey" (Ezekiel 3:3). God made him a "watchman," a sentinel charged with warning the people. For years Ezekiel announced the ruin of Jerusalem through strange actions: lying on his side, shaving his head and beard, packing an exile's bag. He saw the glory of God leave the Temple defiled by idols.

He also insisted on each person's responsibility: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather in his conversion, that he may live" (Ezekiel 33:11). Each one answers for his own deeds before God.

The dry bones

When Jerusalem fell in 587, the people thought all was lost: "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost" (Ezekiel 37:11). Ezekiel then received his most famous vision: a valley full of bones. God told him to prophesy, and the bones came together, covered with sinews, flesh and skin; then the Spirit breathed into them, and they stood up, "a vast army." God promised: "I will open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people." This page is read at the Vigil of Pentecost and at funerals.

The new heart and the good shepherd

Ezekiel announced an inner transformation: "I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts" (Ezekiel 36:26). He denounced the bad shepherds who feed on the flock, and announced that God himself would come for his sheep: "I myself will pasture my sheep. The lost I will seek out" (Ezekiel 34:15-16). Jesus would take up this image, presenting himself as the Good Shepherd.

At the end of the book, Ezekiel saw a new Temple from which a spring flowed, becoming a river that brought life wherever it went (Ezekiel 47). The Church sings this text in Eastertide, in the antiphon Vidi aquam: "I saw water flowing from the right side of the Temple."

Why do Catholics honor the prophet Ezekiel?

Ezekiel is the prophet of hopeless situations. He spoke to an exiled people who had lost everything, and told them that God can bring back to life what seems dead and change the hardest hearts. Christians pray with him to regain hope, to ask for a new heart, and for those going through grief or failure.

To pray with him, read the prayer to the prophet Ezekiel, or follow the novena to the prophet Ezekiel, from April 1 to 9.

PRAYER

Prayer to the Prophet Ezekiel

About this prayer

The prophet Ezekiel spoke to an exiled and discouraged people who thought they had lost everything. His great promises, the new heart, the bones that come back to life, the good shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, are among the strongest pages of hope in the Bible. The prayer below was composed for Saintspedia from these promises.

Prayer to the Prophet Ezekiel

Saint Ezekiel, prophet of the exile,
you saw the glory of God
in a foreign land, far from the Temple:
teach me to recognize that God is present
even where I feel lost.

Lord, as you promised through your prophet,
take away my heart of stone
and give me a heart of flesh.
Put a new spirit within me,
so that I may love and follow your ways.

Where everything seems dried up in me and around me,
in my griefs, my failures, my discouragement,
breathe your Spirit, as on the bones in the valley,
and give me back life and hope.

Today I entrust to you this intention: (state your intention).
You, the good shepherd who seeks the lost sheep,
come and find it and carry it on your shoulders.

Saint Ezekiel, pray for us. Amen.

Prayer composed for Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to him at any time, especially on April 10, when the Roman Martyrology commemorates him, in a time of discouragement, after a loss or a failure, or to ask for a change of heart. The passage of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14) is also read at the Vigil of Pentecost. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to the prophet Ezekiel and read about the life of the prophet Ezekiel.

NOVENA

Novena to the Prophet Ezekiel

This novena was composed for Saintspedia and follows the book of Ezekiel in nine steps. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish on the eve of his commemoration, begin on April 1; it ends on April 9, before April 10. It can also be prayed at any time, especially in a time of grief or discouragement, or before Pentecost.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the Bible passage given, then say the prayer of the day. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into the day. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

Day 1: By the river Chebar

Exiled in Babylon, far from the Temple, Ezekiel still sees the glory of God (Ezekiel 1).

Prayer: Saint Ezekiel, I entrust to you my intention for these nine days. Help me see God present wherever I am, even in exile.

Act of the day: Note one sign of God's presence in your day.

Day 2: The scroll sweet as honey

God gives Ezekiel a scroll to eat: in his mouth it becomes sweet as honey (Ezekiel 3:1-3).

Prayer: Lord, give me a taste for your Word.

Act of the day: Read and ponder a chapter of the Bible.

Day 3: The watchman

God makes Ezekiel a watchman to warn his people (Ezekiel 3:16-21).

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak the truth with love to those in my care.

Act of the day: Check in on someone you are worried about.

Day 4: The glory leaves the Temple

Ezekiel sees the glory of God leave the Temple defiled by idols (Ezekiel 10).

Prayer: Lord, purify my heart, which is your temple, of all that keeps it from you.

Act of the day: Prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation.

Day 5: That he may turn and live

"I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather in his conversion, that he may live" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who are far from you. May your mercy reach them.

Act of the day: Pray for someone you find hard to love.

Day 6: The good shepherd

"I myself will pasture my sheep. The lost I will seek out" (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

Prayer: Lord, good shepherd, come and find what is lost in me and around me.

Act of the day: Reach out to someone who is isolated.

Day 7: The new heart

"I will take from your bodies your stony hearts and give you natural hearts" (Ezekiel 36:26).

Prayer: Lord, take away my heart of stone. Give me a new heart and a new spirit.

Act of the day: Forgive an old offense, at least in prayer.

Day 8: The dry bones

In the valley, the Spirit breathes on the bones, and they stand up, alive (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

Prayer: Spirit of God, breathe on what is dead in me, and give me back hope.

Act of the day: Pray for someone who has died and for those who mourn them.

Day 9: The river of life

From the new Temple a spring flows that becomes a river and gives life to all it touches (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Prayer: Lord, let the living water of your love flow in me. I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Amen.

Act of the day: Make the sign of the cross with holy water, giving thanks for your baptism.

Closing prayer

Saint Ezekiel, prophet of hope, present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days. Obtain for me a new heart, trust when all seems lost, and the joy of the Spirit who brings life. Saint Ezekiel, pray for us. Amen.

Credits and sources

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