

TITLE AND NUMBER: 189. By the rivers of Babylon

REFERENCE AND KEY VERSE(S): Ezekiel 17:22-24

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel, I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the forest will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.”

LOOKING FURTHER: Psalm 137; Matthew 13:31-32; Matthew 6:9-13



What does this Bible passage tell us?

The prophet Ezekiel was called by God to prophesy at a time of great confusion. He was among those people who had been exiled from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon. This was in about 590 BC. The people were far from home. You may remember the Boney M song, ‘By the rivers of Babylon...how shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’ This song is based on their experience of exile.

Ezekiel speaks in poetic language and this passage is both a prophecy and a parable. It is a prophecy of restoration, reminding the people of the nature of God. It is speaking about God’s creative power, that He will plant a shoot and it will bear fruit and grow to become a magnificent cedar which will shelter birds of every kind. For people who were sad and confused, far from home, this would have helped remind them that, despite all the problems, God was still with them and that restoration and new life were possible. That all would be welcome.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus echoed this parable when teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed’ (Matthew 13:31-32). The mustard seed is the smallest of seeds which grows into a large tree and offers shelter.

God’s creative power continues in our world and in our lives today. We are all invited to not only join in and experience God’s mercy, forgiveness, peace and hope for ourselves, but also to bring these gifts to others.

Reflections:

- God’s creative power continues. Where do we see the shoots of new life bringing God’s Kingdom into being, both in our own lives and in the lives of others today?
- How can we help remind others of the love of God and that all are welcome?
- In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray ‘Your kingdom come, Your will be done’ (Matthew 6:9-13). Reflect on these words, how do they help you?

Write or draw something you read in this Bible Study that stood out to you.



Do you have any questions about this week's Bible Study?



How does this week's message apply to your life?



What can we learn about God from this week's passage?



What would you like to ask God this week?



Has God responded to your prayers this week in the way you had hoped for? It's okay to talk to God about this.

