

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

AN EXPOSITION

by

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	7

PART I

1. THE MAN, THE TIMES, AND THE BOOK	10
2. VISIONS OF GOD (chapters 1, 3 and 10)	16
3. EZEKIEL'S CALL AND MISSION (chapters 2 and 3)	33
4. A MAN OF SIGN — THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM (chapter 4)	37
5. A MAN OF SIGN — AFTER THE SIEGE (chapter 5)	42
6. JUDAH'S IDOLATRY (chapter 6)	44
7. THE APPROACHING END OF THE KINGDOM (chapter 7)	48
8. THE PROFANATION OF THE TEMPLE (chapter 8)	51
9. RETRIBUTION (9 : 1-11 : 13)	55
10. THE JEWS OF JERUSALEM AND THE JEWS IN EXILE (11 : 14-25)	60
11. THE SIGN OF AN EMIGRANT (chapter 12)	63
12. FALSE PROPHETS (chapter 13)	67
13. THE HOPELESSNESS OF JUDAH (chapter 14)	69
14. THE WOOD OF A VINE (chapter 15)	71
15. THE ANCESTRY AND CONDUCT OF JUDAH (chapter 16)	73
16. A RIDDLE AND AN ALLEGORY (chapter 17)	73
17. EATING SOUR GRAPES (chapter 18)	82
18. A LAMENTATION (chapter 19)	86
19. "FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE" (chapter 20)	89
20. RUIN, RUIN — "UNTIL HE COMES" (chapter 21)	95
21. THE JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM (chapter 22)	98
22. AHOLAH AND AHOLIBAH (chapter 23)	100
23. THE END OF THE KINGDOM (chapter 24)	103

PART II

1. SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS	107
2. PROPHECIES CONCERNING AMMON (chapter 21 : 28-32 & 25:1-7)	108
3. THE JUDGMENT OF MOAB (chapter 25 : 8-11)	110
4. THE JUDGMENT OF EDOM (chapter 25 : 12-14)	111
5. JUDGMENT ON THE PHILISTINES (chapter 25 : 15-17)	113
6. THE FALL OF TYRE (chapter 26)	114
7. A LAMENTATION OVER TYRE (chapter 27)	118
8. A DIRGE ON THE PRINCE OF TYRE (chapter 28 : 1-19)	121
9. THE JUDGMENT OF ZIDON (chapter 28 : 20-26)	124

10. PROPHECIES CONCERNING EGYPT (chapter 29 : 1-32) ...	125
11. EGYPT — THE GREAT DRAGON (chapter 29 : 1-16) ...	126
12. BABYLON, TYRE, AND EGYPT (chapter 29 : 17-21) ...	129
13. NEBUCHADREZZAR AND EGYPT (chapter 30 : 1-19) ...	131
14. PHARAOH'S BROKEN ARM (chapter 30 : 20-26) ...	133
15. A LESSON FOR PHARAOH (chapter 31) ...	134
16. A LAMENTATION OVER PHARAOH (chapter 32) ...	137

PART III

1. SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES ...	142
2. THE DUTIES OF A PROPHET (chapter 33 : 1-20) ...	143
3. THE REMNANT IN JERUSALEM (chapter 33 : 21-33) ...	146
4. SHEPHERDS AND FLOCKS — THE GOOD SHEPHERD (chapter 34)	149
5. JUDGMENT ON MOUNT SEIR (chapter 35) ...	152
6. THE REVIVAL OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL (chapter 36) ...	154
7A. THE RESURRECTION OF THE NATION (chapter 37) ...	157
7B. THE RESURRECTION OF THE NATION IN HISTORY (chapter 37)	161
8. GOG, THE LAND OF MAGOG (chapter 38, 39) ...	165

PART IV

1. SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES ...	173
2. THE SANCTUARY (chapters 40-42) ...	174
3. THE GLORY OF GOD ENTERS THE TEMPLE (chapter 43 : 1-9) ...	178
4. THE ORDINANCES OF THE TEMPLE (chapter 43 : 10-46) ...	181
5. THE PRINCE AND HIS ASSOCIATES (chapter 44 : 1-8) ...	189
6. PRIESTHOOD IN THE AGE TO COME (chapter 44 : 9-31) ...	193
7. CHANGES IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL (chapters 47, 48) ...	196

PREFACE

This exposition of the writings of the Prophet Ezekiel was first issued over thirty years ago. Now, at the request of a number of applicants, it is being reissued. For a number of reasons however, an opportunity has been taken to make various alterations and additions which time has made desirable.

The original edition was based almost entirely on the translation of the Prophet's writings given in the Authorized Version of the Scriptures made early in the seventeenth century. Since then two important revisions of the Old Testament have been made, the Revised Version issued in 1886, and the Revised Standard Version issued in 1952. Some small use was made of the former in writing the original of this exposition, but, speaking generally it was based on the Authorized Version, so beloved by the great majority of regular Bible readers for its familiar diction. After careful consideration it has been decided to adopt the Revised Standard Version as the basis of this exposition. Two principal reasons may be given for this; 1. Since the Authorized Version was first issued much close attention has been given to the determination of the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly by comparison with such versions as that of the Septuagint (Greek) version. 2. The passing of the centuries since 1611 has made the language of the Authorized Version to become somewhat strange in certain places, particularly when words have changed their meanings during the three and a half centuries that have passed since the translation was made.

There is another reason for revising the book, a reason that only affects certain parts of the contents,

particularly those relating to modern times, and those that concern times yet to come. In this field of Scriptural research many things have happened since this work was first written; indeed they are still happening, and these make the need for reconsideration more urgent. The re-emergence of Palestine and the people of Israel as factors in the world situation of today have made a reconsideration of certain portions of the original edition not merely desirable, but necessary. In the preface to the original edition it was said: "The writings of Ezekiel will always repay attention, but in the times in which this Exposition is issued the study of the book is of exceptional interest. The re-emergence of Palestine and the people of Israel as parts of a great world problem invite attention to what the Prophets have said in relation to them, and on these matters Ezekiel has said much that deserves attention." That statement is even more true today.

It is hoped that this attempt to elucidate the somewhat difficult prophecies of Ezekiel will have some measure of success in preparing a people for the time when the tabernacle of the Lord shall be with men.

Even a casual examination of the book of Ezekiel will show that in one important respect his writings differ in arrangement from those of the other two leading prophets—Isaiah and Jeremiah. Neither of their books is arranged in chronological order, so that their writings often call for careful consideration if it is desired to study them in order. The writings of Ezekiel, on the other hand, are arranged, more or less, in the order in which they were spoken by the Prophet. The first section of the book contains sayings made during the time immediately following his call to be a prophet, dealing almost exclusively with warnings, and threatenings of the punishment that was to overturn the nation

in the near future. These are followed by prophecies concerning peoples around Israel who were, more or less, abettors of Judah in its attitude towards Babylon. These share to some extent in the punishment that was to overtake Israel. Some are related to the changes that were to follow in the distant future. In connection with these there are certain allusions to the peoples of a later date, but who were largely unknown in the days of the Prophet. This fact probably caused his allusions to them to be less definite than they might otherwise have been.

Finally the book is brought to a conclusion with some remarkable descriptions of great geographical changes and the description of a great house of prayer for the peoples living in an ideal state.

A consideration of these matters should make a study of Ezekiel's prophecies both interesting and instructive, especially when it is remembered that the whole book leads to a recognition that the city of Jerusalem is to receive a new name, that of **YAHWEH SHAMMAH**, the Lord is there.

W. H. B.

THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL

PART I

I

THE MAN, THE TIMES, AND THE BOOK

The prophecies of Ezekiel receive comparatively little attention today. The reason for this is not far to seek; the theology of the times has little use for its messages, or for the symbolic personages and predictions it contains, which involve problems of interpretation that discourage the average readers of the Bible. A knowledge of the first principles of the Oracles of God, however, helps to make much of the Prophet's writings plain, though, even with that there remain teachings and applications that promise a rich reward to the student who gives his mind to a study of the book.

Rightly to appreciate the messages of a prophet it is necessary to know something of the times in which he lived. A prophet was a preacher whose primary duty it was to call his contemporaries to righteousness. He was usually also a foreteller of future events, though that was a secondary feature of his mission. In the case of Ezekiel it is particularly important to visualize the historical situation in which he lived, for apart from a knowledge of that it is not easy to appreciate the figures and the predictions contained in his writings.

Of the Prophet himself nothing is known beyond what is mentioned in the book; he is not alluded to anywhere else in the Scriptures. He was a priest, and therefore a member of the higher classes of Jerusalem. His father was named Buzi, of whom, however, nothing

more is known. He was one of those who were carried away to Babylon with King Jehoiachin, who were described as "the princes, and the mighty men of valour . . . all the craftsmen and the smiths, Jehoiachin and the king's mother, his wives and his officers, and the chief men of the land . . . and all the men of might, all of them strong and apt for war".¹ Josephus adds that Ezekiel was only a youth when he was carried away². There does not appear to be any support for this statement, which seems to be very unlikely.

It may be presumed that Ezekiel was a member of the family of Zadok. He would therefore be conversant with the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. His youth would have been spent amid the changes brought about by the Josian reformation, and he seems to have been strongly influenced by it. The events which followed the death of Josiah, as the kingdom experienced one disaster after another, deeply affected him, and are referred to in his book. He was married, and dwelt in a house of his own at Tel-Abib, by the River Chebar. The "river" Chebar was probably one of the canals that had been constructed near the city of Babylon, which were often spoken of as rivers.

The position of the people of Judah in the times of the prophet was a peculiar one. They were particularly evil—spiritually, morally, and politically. Other prophets had warned the people that their conduct would result in evils overtaking them, including the evil of captivity. The last king of Judah of whom it was said that he was good was Josiah, whose death was the beginning of the end, an end which was to result in the captivity of the people. That captivity did not come immediately, it came as the end of a process, marked by stages. Six successive stages are recorded. (1) In the

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

third year of Jehoiakim, who was placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh of Egypt, three months after the death of Josiah, certain of the seed royal and of the nobles were carried away to Babylon³. That would have been the first year of the reign of Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon. (2) Later, that is in the seventh year of this king, three thousand and twenty-three Jews were taken to Babylon⁴. (3) Later Jehoiachin and his mother, the king's wives, and his officers, together "with all the princes, and the men of might, the craftsmen and the smiths" were carried away⁵. (4) After a period of ten years, that is the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar, eight hundred and thirty-two individuals were carried to Babylon⁶. (5) In the following year "the residue of the people that were left in the city, and those that fell away, and the residue of the multitude, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, carried away"⁷. (6) After this there was a further deportation of seven hundred and forty-five persons⁸.

Ezekiel commenced his career as a prophet in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. By that time a considerable section of the better type of citizens had been carried away, whilst the rest of the nation remained in the land of Judah. The calamities that had overtaken the nation should have aroused the remnant to a realization of their evil ways and their consequences. They did nothing of the kind. Instead of realizing the inevitability of further disaster, those who remained in Judah, and those already in captivity, looked for a speedy change in their fortunes. There may have been a reason for their hopes. This is indicated by the fact that the people of Jerusalem were able to put up such a resistance as they did before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Nothing but a determined spirit of

nationalism could have enabled them to do so. Illustrations are furnished by the Prophet's writings. "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth", was a saying of the time. They were incredulous of the words of Ezekiel foretelling the fall of the city. This illustrates the spirit in which his words were heard, even among those already in Babylon. Ezekiel's contemporary, Jeremiah, still in Jerusalem, found himself contending with the same spirit.

Another contemporary of Ezekiel was Daniel. He was already in Babylon, a highly placed servant in the service of the king. Through him God gave some of the most remarkable prophecies to be found in the Old Testament. There is no indication that he and Ezekiel ever met, but there is evidence that the prophet's writings were known to Daniel. Twice Ezekiel referred to Daniel⁹, and Daniel was a diligent student of the writings of Jeremiah¹⁰. Communications passed between the Jews of Jerusalem and the captives in Babylon. The positions of the three prophets were strangely dissimilar, but the burden of their messages was the same: each spoke of judgments to come and of the glories that would be seen in the Messianic age. All three were preachers of righteousness, exhorting those who heard them to forsake evil and follow that which was good.

Ezekiel's name was descriptive of the man; it means "God will strengthen". No prophet required to be sustained by the strength given by God, more than did Ezekiel. Placed among a hard-hearted and stiff-necked people, it was necessary that he should be a man who could stand up against opposition. To that end he was promised by God, "I have made thy face hard against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than flint, have I made

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

thy forehead; fear them not.”¹¹ One pictures him an austere man, standing aloof from his contemporaries—in the world but not of it, tacitly condemning it by his attitude even when not speaking in condemnation of it. Yet he was a man of feeling, as may be realized by the way in which he recorded the circumstances surrounding the death of his wife¹².

Words were not always forthcoming from him. When he received his call Ezekiel was told, “I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth that thou shalt be dumb, and shall not be to them a reprover, for they are a rebellious house”¹³. That a man who was usually silent should be moved from time to time to speak in the name of the Lord, reproving the people for their evil ways, must have caused astonishment. This condition lasted until the fall of Jerusalem, some seven and a half years later. From that time he was able to speak freely, and he records, “My mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb”. In the later period of Ezekiel’s ministry he seems to have been talked about by the captives. They spoke of him in a way expressed by God when He said to him: “You are to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it”¹⁴.

One other fact relating to the Prophet may be mentioned before passing to the consideration of his book. On something like a hundred occasions Ezekiel was addressed as “Son of man.” When it is remembered that he was a man of sign, the term is suggestive. He was, in some respects, a sign of the coming Messiah. Considering the few facts we know of him we realize that he was separate from the people, misunderstood by them, whilst they refused to hear his words. These facts remind us of Him who was “separate from sinners”,

THE MAN, THE TIMES, AND THE BOOK

“despised and rejected”, one who “came unto his own and his own received him not”. Equally suggestive is the fact that at the end of his work, Ezekiel was accorded a vision of a sanctuary in which the true “Son of man” will be a prince in the age to come.

Turning now to the book, it should be noted that it is divided into sections: I—An introductory vision in the course of which the Prophet receives his call to be the messenger of God to the people in captivity; II—A series of symbolic actions and visions which indicated judgments that were impending upon Jerusalem and its people; III—A number of prophecies directed against the people because of their evil ways. Sections II and III may be regarded as one in which symbolic actions and plain sayings respectively occur. These lead to the twenty-fourth chapter in which the fall of Jerusalem and its effects are symbolized by the death of the Prophet’s wife and his reactions to that event. Up to this point the prophecies are generally of rebuke and threatened judgment, with only an occasional gleam of hope. Then follows IV—A section devoted to predictions concerning some of the peoples who lived near the people of Israel; followed by V—A record of the fall of Jerusalem. At this point the character of the book changes, and in section VI—Mingled with rebukes of Israel’s shepherds, or rather false shepherds, the messages become those of consolation and deliverance, and the uprise of one who is termed the Prince. One chapter here may seem to be out of place. It is not so really; it serves to emphasize the difference between Judah and Edom, the descendants of the twin brothers Jacob and Esau in the crisis of their histories. Then, resuming the classification, come VII—Some outside peoples who have not before appeared upon the scene; and, finally, VIII—A description of a

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

temple and its ordinances, associated with a time of restoration, a division of the land between the twelve tribes of Israel on an entirely novel principle. The whole ends with the consummation of the vision in the new name to be given to the city of Jerusalem. YAHWEH SMAMMAH—The Lord is there.

¹² Kings 24 : 14-16; ²JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 10 : 6 : 3.

³Daniel 1 : 1; ⁴Jer. 52 : 28; ⁵² Kings 24 : 12-16; ⁶Jer. 52 : 29;

⁷² Kings 25 : 11; ⁸Jer. 52 : 30.

⁹Ezek. 14 : 14 and 20; ¹⁰Daniel 9 : 2; ¹¹Ezek. 3 : 9.

¹²Ezek. 24 : 16; ¹³Ezek. 3 : 26; ¹⁴Ezek. 33 : 31 and 32.

2

VISIONS OF GOD

(*Ezekiel, Chapters 1, 3 and 10*)

No prophet received his call to service under more impressive circumstances than did Ezekiel. Those described by Isaiah were grand and impressive. He saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, with His train filling the temple. Above stood the Seraphim, each of whom had six wings, with two of which he covered his face, with another two his feet, while the third two were used to fly. As he looked at the scene Isaiah heard them saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory". The impressiveness of what he saw and heard brought Isaiah to a sense of unworthiness, yet with a willingness to undertake whatever commission was assigned to him.¹ The visions which called Ezekiel to act as a prophet of the Lord were much more complicated, and are recorded

in great detail. They are not all to be found in his opening chapter, but it is purposed to consider them generally in this section.

Four years from the time when king Jehoiachin was carried into Babylon as a captive Ezekiel was among some who had been taken to Babylon with the king. He was sitting by the river Chebar, when he saw what he describes as "Visions of God". The visions were repeated later, and it is purposed to consider them as a whole here. How far Ezekiel recognized their meaning cannot be said : probably the implications were withheld from him. They must, however, have made a deep impression on him. We are privileged in being able to place other somewhat similar appearances beside them, accompanied by hints which enable us to form a general idea of what they imply.

As Ezekiel was sitting among the exiles he felt the hand of the Lord come upon him. As a result he saw a wondrous sight which he proceeds to describe. First of all he experienced a stormy wind blowing from the north, and saw a great cloud, surrounded by a brightness, with fire continually flashing from it. In the midst of the fire there was, as it were, gleaming bronze. An intense brilliancy is implied by the words associated with the vision, and this is emphasized by the terms that are used. In the Septuagint translation the word *elektron* is used to describe the effect. It is a term the Greeks applied to amber and to a metallic alloy of gold to one of silver. The alloy was noted for its brilliance. The intensity of the brightness implied by the term may be suggested by the fact that *elektron* is the Greek basis from which our words electricity, electrons, and other similar terms are derived. The brilliancy of the most concentrated light produced by electricity may

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

suggest something of the brilliancy associated with Ezekiel's visions of God.

Out of the brilliancy Ezekiel saw four human-like forms emerge, each having four faces and four wings. Their feet are described as being like the soles of a calf's foot, sparkling like burnished brass. Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. Each had four wings on their four sides. The four faces belonging to each of them differed from one another; each one had the face of a man, the face of an ox, the face of a lion, and the face of an eagle. It will be appreciated that each of these likenesses represented one of the highest forms of animal life.

The strangeness of these beings, so unlike anything known of animal life, indicates that they are to be understood as symbols. That being so, what did they symbolize? Had we been forced to gather what we could from Ezekiel's description, the question would be, more or less, incapable of being answered. Fortunately other allusions to similar beings elsewhere, enable us to appreciate what the four living ones represent. They are certainly manifestations of the divine; visions that are conveniently described as God-manifestations, though that term only leads to a further question: If God is manifested in the beings described, who are those beings?

To answer this question it will be helpful to examine other allusions to creatures more or less parallel to those seen by Ezekiel, and to ask what they represent—that is, if the corresponding illustrations supply the information. Some are mentioned in the Apocalypse where, in the Authorized Version, they are spoken of as beasts, but in the Revised Standard Version as "living creatures", the same term as Ezekiel uses in his allusions to them. The points of agreement between the two descriptions

are sufficient to suggest that the two representations are parallel to each other. The points of agreement are: 1—The number of living creatures referred to—four; 2—The likeness of their faces, those of a lion, a man, an ox, and an eagle; 3—The possession of innumerable eyes; 4—The fact that in each case they possess six wings; and 5—That in each case their wings are full of eyes. In the book of Ezekiel they are said to constitute Visions of God, while in the Apocalypse they are said to be “in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, while He Who sits upon the throne is addressed as “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come”² while He is addressed with the words, “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou didst create all things, and by Thy will they existed and were created.”³

In the same vision in the Apocalypse the “living ones” are spoken of in a way that leaves no doubt as to whom they are intended to represent. The words are “Worthy art Thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for Thou wast slain, and by Thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth”.⁴ An alternate reading is “we shall reign on the earth”. Such a saying could only proceed from those who are redeemed from among men by the sacrifice of Christ, and have received the gift of immortality.

It may, perhaps, be objected that it is incongruous to represent the redeemed participating in the actions referred to by Ezekiel when speaking of things that happened in his day, thousands of years before the time of their resurrection and immortalization. The idea

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

seems to be an anachronism. It must be remembered, however, that the whole is a representation in symbol, and that symbols and realities necessarily differ. Paul, referring to the saints, said, "All things are for your sakes". The consummation of Ezekiel's prophecies will see the saints in association with their head, the Lord Jesus, taking their position in the age to come. As all things are for their sakes, they will be with him to constitute "the living glory" of the Age to come. In symbol, therefore, they may be represented as participating in the working out of God's purposes, and on this principle may be identified with the forces through which the Prophet's predictions will be fulfilled.

Passing to the detailed description of the living ones, a number of particulars need to be considered: (1) their faces; (2) their wings; (3) their hands; (4) their feet; (5) their eyes; (6) their general appearance; (7) their actions; and (8) the wheels which are associated with them.

(1) The faces.—As already noted each of the living creatures had four faces, those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. In one description of their appearance, that given in chapter 10, the face of a cherub is given instead of that of an ox. From this some have concluded that the general form of the living ones was that of an ox. That, however, cannot be the case, as their appearance is said to have been that of a man. The meanings intended to be conveyed by the four faces need not present any difficulty, in view of what has been said already. It is obvious that they have some connection with the human race; for they are associated with the redeemed from among men. For this reason nothing more need be said about the face of man in the description.

The second face was that of a lion. There is some-

thing majestic about the face of a lion, which is often spoken of as the king of beasts. This has entered into the symbolic language of Scripture; the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" is a well recognized symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. The lionlike face of the living ones, therefore, suggests the royal dignity associated with the redeemed, who are to be kings and priests unto God.

In the third place the living ones had a face like an ox. In the east, and the east was the place where these Visions of God were given, the ox was the animal associated with work; it drew the plough, it trod out the corn. The likeness suggested by the ox face, therefore, indicates that the living ones have a work to do.

So far as the eagle face is concerned, the meaning must be gathered from a consideration of the eagle's place in nature. It is the high-soaring bird, keen of sight, rising far above the habitations of men, full of strength and vigour. It suggests something of the divine to which those associated with the living ones will have attained. Almost instinctively the words enter into the memory, as used in the book of Isaiah, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint".⁵

The unity in diversity of the living creatures, illustrated in the four faces possessed by each, is beautifully illustrated in the life of the One who is their head, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fourfold record of his life in the days of his flesh, answers to the four faces possessed by each of the living ones. It is fitting that it should be so. In the ultimate of the purpose of God, Jesus expressed it in his prayer of sanctification on their behalf. His words were, "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them, that they may be one even as

we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me".⁶ That unity accords with the unity that is to be seen in the four gospel stories as they combine to draw the complete picture of the life of Christ. Matthew records the life of Jesus as the destined King in the kingdom of God; Mark with his record of work, and the constant use of such terms as straightway and anon, Luke with the constant human touch that characterizes his gospel, and John, constantly bringing out the divine element in the story of Jesus, complete the whole.

(2) Next to be considered are the wings of the living creatures. They "touched one another, they went everyone straight forward without turning as they went". "They stretched out straight, one toward another." Each of the creatures with its wing touched the wing of another, while two wings covered their bodies.⁷ Touching one another involves that as they were outstretched they formed a square. Wings are for flight and protection. Flight is an ideal means of progression, it is also graceful. The speed with which birds can fly exceeds the speed of movement attained by animals. This feature is emphasized in relation to the living creatures, for it is said, "they darted to and fro like a flash of lightning". The possession of wings enabled them to mount above the earth. To quote a verse already referred to in relation to those symbolized by these living ones, "they shall mount up with wings as eagles".

There is a suggestion of mediatorial office in the possession of wings: in a way, they unite earth and heaven. The thought is connected with a saying previously mentioned—those represented are kings and

priests unto God; a channel of communication between God and His creature man.

Of the protective element suggested in this feature of the living creatures, the Scriptures give many illustrations. Thus it is said of God, "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge."⁸ "The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings."⁹ Similarly Jesus used the symbol when he wept over Jerusalem, saying, "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings".¹⁰ As associates of Him who will save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor, the redeemed will be protectors of the people after the judgments of antecedent times.

Wings also suggest the multitudinous element in the symbol, something after the example of an army. "And when they went I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound like the sound of a host."¹¹ This aspect of the figure accords with the application of the living creatures to the saints in the post-resurrectional epoch when they constitute the fourfold camp of a mighty host, the Israel of God.

(3) The next feature was the hands of the living creatures. "Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands", though the term presumably includes the idea that they were joined to their bodies by arms. Hands and arms are effective members of the human body, a fact that emphasizes the idea expressed in the statement, "Thou (God) hast given me the shield of thy salvation, and thy right hand supported me and made me great."¹² The hands of the living creatures suggest power in effective application, a power that

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

finds its perfection in the subjugation of the world to Christ as the Messiah in his day of exaltation.

(4) The fourth feature to which Ezekiel referred was the feet possessed by the living creatures. They were "straight feet" like the sole of a calf's foot, and were like burnished bronze. The Hebrew word translated "straight" is *yosher*, which has the meaning to be straight or even, figuratively to be right, pleasant and prosperous. The name Jasher is derived from it, a name which is defined as meaning upright. The application of the word to the feet of the living creatures implies that their walk is upright. The fact that they sparkled like burnished bronze implies that they are to be used in the infliction of righteous judgment, imposing the true and righteous judgments of the Lord God Omnipotent. In this they may find an application to the words of Malachi, "Behold the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant, and all evil doers will be stubble; and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch . . . And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be as ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts."¹³

(5) One of the most remarkable features in the imagery connected with the living creatures is their eyes. They are first mentioned in connection with the wheels. These had rims and spokes (the Hebrew word is somewhat uncertain). These rims were full of eyes round about.¹⁴ The remarkable multiplicity of the organ of sight must indicate remarkable keenness of vision, even to the extent of omniscience. This may be coupled with an allusion to eyes in the prophecy of Zechariah, where it is said, "For behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven facets

(A.V. eyes) I will engrave its inscription" and "these seven are the eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth".¹⁵ When such powers are associated with speed of movement, movement "like a flash of lightning", there is no limit to the possibilities that are opened up.

(6). The next point has to do with the general appearance of the living creatures. Of this it is said, "In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro like a flash of lightning, and the living creatures darted to and fro like a flash of lightning."¹⁶ The saying is something like the Apocalyptic vision of a throne from which proceeded flashes of lightning, and voices, and peals of thunder.¹⁷ Such statements are usually associated with divine judgments, and such is evidently the general design of the whole conception described by Ezekiel. The whole vision formed, as it were, the throne of the cherubim. Before those who are elsewhere said to be kings and priests, reigning on the earth, the world must be subjected. The rolling thunder and the flashing lightnings prepare the way for the calm that is to succeed the storm.

(7). The next feature is equally suggestive: it has to do with the general actions of the living creatures. "Each went straight forward; wherever the Spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went." The word for straight is the same as that used before: it implies exactly what our word "straight" implies. An object is set for accomplishment. No strategy is needed; the living creatures will perform exactly what is set before them. Such power can only come from God. Actually it is God Who will be acting in and through them. As it is expressed, "Whither the Spirit is to go the living creatures go." Putting all together, therefore,

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

the ideas may be summed up in three words, Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence. With such powers nothing will be impossible.

(8). Finally there were the wheels. Probably these were the most remarkable element in the Visions of God. They are described as follows: "Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them." (The Hebrew reads "four of their faces.") As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction; their appearance was like the gleaming of a chrysolite, and the four had the same likeness, their construction being, as it were, a wheel within a wheel. When they went they went in any of their four directions, without turning as they went. The four wheels had rims and they had spokes, and their rims were full of eyes round about . . . Wherever the Spirit would go they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels."¹⁸

In a later description of the wheels it is said: "There were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was like the sparkling chrysolite . . . And their rims and their spokes, and the wheels were full of eyes round about, the wheels that the four of them had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing the whirling wheels."¹⁹

The association of the living creatures with the wheels suggests something like a chariot with its rider; the chariot of the cherubim all energized by one Spirit, the Spirit of God. It should, however, be noted that the Hebrew word for wheel in the second quotation (verses 2 and 6) and the first occurrence in verse 13, differs from that generally used in the first and tenth chapters of Ezekiel. The word used generally is *owpham*, meaning

to revolve, a word often used in relation to chariots. In the three exceptional cases it is *galgal*, to roll or roll away.

The colour of the wheels is said to be that of the colour of a chrysolite, a transparent stone with a refulgence as of gold. It has been identified with the topaz. Those most prized were those that, when placed alongside gold, imparted to it a whitish hue, something like a silvery gold. This added to the glowing appearance of the vision as a whole.

The expression "a wheel within a wheel" seems to imply that the two were arranged at right angles with each other so that they could go in any direction.

The visions of God, taken as a whole, indicate something of the ultimate purpose of God in human history. Ezekiel lived in one of the crises of that history, when things had reached a turning point. To apply all the particulars to any individual event would be out of place. The symbolic personages and instruments must be regarded from the standpoint of the whole working out of the Divine purpose. Visions of God are related to all His purposes as they are being worked out to inaugurate the time when God will be "all in all", or, as the R.S.V. expresses it, that "God may be everything to every one". When that time is reached the programme will have been worked out in all its aspects.

This review of Ezekiel's visions of God may be brought to a conclusion by a few general comments.

The first of these is some thought concerning the various chapters in which Ezekiel has pictured them. The combination of colours in his account is very striking. He has mentioned the crystal, colourless and pellucid, the gleaming throne of burnished bronze, the sapphire, azure in colour, refulgent with spots of gold, with the

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

golden amber of the electron. These bring before the reader an idea of the purity of the immeasurable depths of the heavens and the glory of the sun. It suggests a wondrous future overarched with the rainbow of promise gathering in itself all the colours of the spectrum. All this, and more, is suggested by the Visions of God that introduce the prophecies of Ezekiel. They span the whole field covered by his revelation of the future until the time when his final words are realised, "The Lord is there".

Two matters that have been suggested in considering these visions may focus the great plan of God in relation to the earth: they concern the appearance of the bow in the cloud from time to time, and the place served by the cherubim in connection with the Divine purpose.

There is meaning in the allusion to the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain. The context in which it occurs is significant. Immediately before, Ezekiel had referred to a throne on which was the appearance of a man. From his loins downward there was the appearance of fire like gleaming bronze, while all around him was a brightness. From the whole vision an idea of judgment emerges, and it is in this feature of the visions that the significance of the allusion to "the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain" has its significance.

The first mention of the bow that is in the cloud is in the record of the days immediately after the Flood, and its significance in Ezekiel's mention of it arises from this fact. A "day of rain" had run its appointed course; a world had perished under a judgment of God. Only eight human beings had escaped from that judgment, the sole survivors of the race. In gratitude for their deliverance Noah offered a burnt sacrifice, a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Consequent on this it is said the Lord

smelled the pleasing odour, and said He would never again destroy every living creature as He had done. He then blessed Noah, gave him some simple commandments, and made a covenant with him and his family. It was in these circumstances that He said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations. I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember My covenant . . . the everlasting covenant which is between God and every living creature."²⁰

The bow in the cloud as seen by Ezekiel in his Visions of God was therefore a reminder that, however severe the judgments suggested by the terrible appearance of the living creatures, the wheels, the fire and flames, the judgments they portended were not to be entirely destructive: in wrath God would remember mercy.

There was a similar implication in the fact that the living creatures, as they were termed in the opening visions, were later said to be the cherubim. A similar lesson was taught by this. The first mention of the cherubim is in the record of the events that took place in Eden. Adam and Eve had disobeyed the command that had been given to them. They were therefore expelled from the garden, and cherubim were placed at the east to guard the way to the tree of life, a tree that would have continued them in life. With the cherubim there was a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the tree from unauthorized approach.

It might have been thought that the object of placing the cherubim there was simply to prevent

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Adam and Eve approaching the tree. The word used, "guard", has a much wider meaning than that. It means to keep, to watch, to preserve or lay up, to mark or observe, and other kindred ideas. It was "the way" that was to be preserved, not barred for ever. The tree remained with its lifegiving properties. God's way remained, and might be used to permit men to approach the tree in a "way" appointed by God. The tree, as a metaphor, remained to the end of the Scriptures. In the letters to the Seven Churches of Asia the hope was held out that permission would be given to "eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God",²¹ while in the last chapter of the book reference is made to the tree of life which yielded its fruit each month, and whose fruit was intended to be used for "the healing of the nations".²² The purpose served by the cherubim was preservation, not destruction, though, at the same time, they would be used to prevent unauthorized approach to the source of life.

Other allusions in the Bible to the cherubim are in accord with this. A few may be considered. The next reference to them after Eden is in the account of the tabernacle that was constructed by the children of Israel while they were in the Wilderness. Figures of cherubim were embroidered on the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy.²³ Two, made of beaten gold, were placed on the ark of the covenant inside the Most Holy Place. They therefore formed an integral part of the Mercy-seat, toward which their faces were turned,²⁴ "and there", God said, "I will meet with you, and from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim, that are upon the ark of the testimony will I speak with you all that I will give you in commandment."²⁵ It will be seen that here again the

cherubim are associated with God's way of salvation. Preservation, not condemnation, is their primary purpose.

Passing to the records of Israel's history, allusions to the cherubim are found. When the Israelites fought with the Philistines when Eli was judge, and were defeated, they sent for the ark of the Covenant of the Lord of hosts "Who is enthroned on the cherubim"—though they did so with disastrous results.

In the temple constructed by Solomon the cherubim occupied much the same position as in the tabernacle in the wilderness. As figures they were placed within the Oracle, that is, the Most Holy place. Representations of them were to be seen upon walls and doors. They formed part of the structure on which the brazen sea was placed. In connection with the construction of the Temple it is recorded, "Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, underneath the wings of the cherubim."²⁶ An interesting allusion to them is found in the statement that when David gave instructions to Solomon for building the temple, he gave "his plans for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings that covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord."²⁷

This idea of the chariot of the cherubim accords with the visions seen by Ezekiel. Chariots were mostly used in warfare; yet they were also used in royal progresses. They therefore emphasize the dignity of the rider and the preparedness for warfare if necessary.

A review of the implications of the appearance of the cherubim in the symbology of Ezekiel's Visions of God may be brought to a conclusion by looking at their place in the poetry of the Psalms. In a Psalm of thanksgiving David said of God,

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

He rode on a cherub and flew;

He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.²⁸

The Psalm in which these words occur was written when God had delivered David from the hands of all his enemies, and from the hands of Saul. The earth had reeled and rocked, the foundations of the mountains had trembled and quaked.

In another Psalm it was written—

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,

Thou Who leddest Joseph like a flock !

Thou Who art enthroned above the cherubim,

Shine forth.²⁹

In yet another are the words

The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble !

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the
earth quake !

'The Lord is great in Zion;

He is exalted over all the peoples.³⁰

Putting all these testimonies together concerning the bow in the cloud in the day of rain, and the salvation with which the cherubim are associated, it will be seen that, terrible as the judgments announced by Ezekiel may have been, the end of the matter is associated with salvation, not destruction. That is exactly the way in which Ezekiel's prophecies are arranged. No other prophet's writings are arranged in the same way, first judgments, but in the end deliverance and salvation.

¹Isa. 6 : 1-3; ²Rev. 4 : 6-8; ³Rev. 4 : 11; ⁴Rev. 5 : 9; ⁵Isa. 40 : 31; ⁶John 17 : 22 and 23; ⁷Ezek. 1 : 9 and 23; ⁸Psalm 91 : 4; ⁹Ibid. 36 : 7; ¹⁰Matt. 23 : 37-39; ¹¹Ezek. 1 : 24; ¹²Psalm 18 : 35; ¹³Mal. 4 : 1; ¹⁴Ezek. 1 : 18; ¹⁵Zech. 3 : 9; 4 : 10; ¹⁶Ezek. 1 : 13 and 14; ¹⁷Rev. 4 : 5; ¹⁸Ezek. 1 : 15-20; ¹⁹Ezek. 10 : 9 and 10; ²⁰Gen. 9 : 9; 17; ²¹Rev. 2 : 7; ²²Rev. 22 : 2; ²³Exod. 26 : 1; ²⁴Exod. 25 : 18; ²⁵Exod. 25 : 22; ²⁶1 Kings 8 : 6; ²⁷1 Chron. 28 : 18; ²⁸Psalm 18 : 10; ²⁹Psalm 80 : 1; ³⁰Psalm 99 : 1 and 2.

EZEKIEL'S CALL AND MISSION

(Ezekiel, Chapters 2 and 3)

Amid visions such as those that have been described, Ezekiel heard a voice that called upon him to enter upon his ministry as a prophet of the Lord. The impression made upon him by the things he saw in the Visions of God, were such that they caused him to fall upon his face, and it was while he was in that attitude that he heard the voice of God telling him to stand on his feet. So deep, however, had been the effect of only the beginning of the vision that it was necessary for the Spirit to enter into him, set him upon his feet, and for him to hear the words of the Lord. Thus was clearly indicated the impression made upon him by the things he had seen.

It was needful that some exceptional circumstances should attend his call to service. Seldom, if ever, was a prophet called upon to face such a task as that which was before him. On the other hand, no one ever entered upon a life's mission with a more definite assurance that, so far as his contemporaries were concerned, his ministry would be in vain. When men are called upon to undertake a difficult mission it is customary to encourage them with, at least, some hope that there may be some satisfactory outcome from their labours. In Ezekiel's case it was the reverse. Failure was foretold from the beginning. Those to whom he spoke would look upon his words as idle tales. His hearers would be impudent and stubborn, a nation of rebels who had rebelled against God from the days of the past. A mission

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

given with such anticipations was obviously a difficult one to face. Yet he was told that whether they heard, or refused to listen, they would know that a prophet had been among them. At the same time Ezekiel was assured that at some time they would realize that he had been a true prophet. That, however, would not be until they witnessed the fulfilment of the things he had foretold. Then they would be compelled to recognize that he had been a messenger from God.

Something more than a mere message seems to have been necessary to fit Ezekiel to undertake his mission. That "something more" was of a threefold character. The first was indicated by sign, the second by a temperamental condition induced by God, and the third by the direct operation of the Spirit of God. They may be considered in order.

First of all Ezekiel was given a written scroll which he was told to eat. It was inscribed with writing on the front and back, so that he was able to see that it consisted of words announcing lamentation, mourning and woe. Something of the same character happened hundreds of years later to the Apostle John, when he was an exile in the isle of Patmos. On that occasion, as John partook of the scroll it was sweet while it was in his mouth but turned to bitterness after he had eaten it. That was not the case with the scroll given to Ezekiel: his only comment was that it was sweet as honey. The obvious inference from his remark is that he found himself in sympathy with the thoughts expressed in it. He was of a very different disposition from John. There was a further difference between the two: Ezekiel was at the beginning of his career; John was nearing the close of his. Ezekiel was a lover of Zion, jealous of its standing with God, and personally indignant at the characters that had been

developed by the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem. The lamentation, mourning and woe were in accord with his own feelings about his fellows, and, may be, especially so with the unworthy race that were still within the city.

The second element in the preparation of Ezekiel, that of his temperament, is referred to in the saying addressed to him after reminding him of the character of the people to whom he was to act as a prophet. "The house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to Me . . . Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces and your forehead hard against their foreheads; Like an adamant, harder than flint, have I made your forehead; fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house." It was necessary that Ezekiel should be a man of stern mould. His duties would be difficult, and he must not lightly turn aside.

An important lesson is to be learned from this. God prepares His servants for the work He designs them to do; He selects suitable men and prepares them for their work.

The third element in the prophet's preparation was represented by word and by symbolic action. "He (God) said unto me, 'All My words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears, And go get you to the exiles, to your people, and say to them,' 'Thus says the Lord God'; whether they hear or refuse to hear. Then the Spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of God arose from its place I heard behind me the sound of a great earthquake; it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a great earthquake . . . The Spirit lifted me up and took

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me, and I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who dwelt by the river Chebar.'” There for seven days he sat among them overwhelmed. The bitterness he did not experience when he partook of the roll, he felt now. In plain language, Ezekiel was sent by God, and the words he was to speak were put in his mouth by the Holy Spirit.

After seven days’ silence during which he remained astonished among the exiles, the word of God came to him and told him something more of the duties that lay upon him. “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me.” Ezekiel therefore stood in a special relation to the house of Israel; a position involving grave responsibilities for him. The duties of a watchman are simple but important. On the faithful discharge of his duties the safety of others depends. Israel at that time was beset by many dangers, moral and spiritual. Living as exiles far from the city of Jerusalem, with its temple to remind them of God and His claims to their reverence and obedience, it was easy to forget the obedience they owed to God, and the obligations that were upon them. When they lived in Judea they were in constant association with the temple, even though they failed to heed its message. Now, far away from city and temple, there was grave danger of overlooking the claims of God. In the circumstances they were more than ever in need of a watchman to give them warnings from time to time. Ezekiel’s duty as a watchman is a reminder to people of all generations.¹

After his visit to Tel-abib, of which nothing more is recorded, Ezekiel was told to go to the plain, or the valley. The spot is not further indicated. There he

again saw the glory of the Lord he had seen before. Again he fell on his face, and was again raised to his feet by the Spirit. Then God spoke again . . . Ezekiel was told "Go, shut yourself within your house. And you, O son of man, behold cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them so that you cannot go out among the people; and I will make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be dumb, and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you I will open your mouth, and you shall say unto them 'Thus says God; let him hear; and he that will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.'"

A prophet who was only able to speak when he had a message to deliver must have seemed a strange man to his contemporaries.

¹Heb. 13 : 17.

4

EZEKIEL A MAN OF SIGN—THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

(Ezekiel, Chapter 4)

Having seen the way in which Ezekiel was constituted a prophet it is necessary to follow his career. He was not always to speak to the people: his temporary dumbness was met sometimes by acting his prophecies; signifying by the things he did, the ideas he was to communicate to his contemporaries. It was in that

character that his first prophecy was indicated. It concerned the city of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was told to take a brick on which he was to represent something that would convey his meaning to those who saw his actions and sketches. The brick was, presumably, a tile, or tablet, made of clay, like those that may be seen in our museums. On this he was to portray a representation of the city of Jerusalem. Whether the shape indicated the identity of the city one cannot say; probably the circumstances of the times would be sufficient to indicate that Jerusalem was intended. It was to represent Jerusalem and the surrounding earth-works and camps. He was to picture battering rams round the city, and an iron plate was to be placed between himself and the city walls. The whole represented a city in a state of siege. As such it was to be a sign to the house of Israel, or to such as were already in captivity. It looked a childish action, a kind of make-believe, but for a man who was temporarily dumb, it enabled him to convey a lesson to those who saw it.

The majority of Israel buoyed themselves up with a hope that there would soon be a change of fortune. Babylon might meet with a reverse; then they would be restored to their homeland. Ezekiel's action was intended to show that such hopes were vain. The plan portraying the city and the siege works around it should have convinced them that there was no room for such a hope to be fulfilled. To complete the impression Ezekiel was told to do certain things in relation to himself.

First of all he was to lie upon his left side for three hundred and ninety days, during which he was to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. They were to be equal to the number of the years of their punishment. After these were completed he was to lie on his right side for forty

days, during which he was to bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Finally he was told that God had assigned him a "day for a year". That there should be no failure in relation to the sign, Ezekiel was told that God would put cords upon him so that he would not be able to turn from one side to the other until he had completed the days of the siege. During this time his arm was to be uncovered, and he was to prophecy against the city. It may be pointed out that the LXX gives the number of the days during which Ezekiel was to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel as one hundred and ninety.

The whole procedure was to be an acted prophecy to the captives, though what particular period was intended to be represented by the number of years is not clear. Are they to be regarded as years of iniquity or years of punishment? Or are they to be regarded as arbitrary periods? Where no definite indication is given, no certainty is possible. In the circumstances it is better to leave the question an open one, and pass on to consider the further instructions given to the prophet. These were of two kinds: one regarded him as representing the besiegers, the other as the besieged.

The former has already been mentioned; it provided that during the four hundred and thirty days Ezekiel was to lie with his arm bare. An uncovered arm suggests an arm bared for action, freed from any trammeling influences exercised by clothing. In this therefore Ezekiel represented the besiegers, ready for action in anything connected with the siege. It indicated that so long as the siege lasted, the enemy would be free to prosecute it without let or hindrance.

The other instructions given concerned him as representing the besieged. It indicated the extreme

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

sufferings they would have to endure. Ezekiel was to take wheat, barley, beans and lentils, together with millet and spelt, all of which were to be placed in a single vessel. From a mixture of these he was to make his bread, using twenty shekels weight each day. The mixing of various grain and seed indicated the shortage of food the besiegers were to suffer; there would not be sufficient of any of the ingredients to make into a loaf, and when they were all mixed together the total quantity was equal to about nine ounces, far below the ordinary requirements of the human frame to be kept in vigour. The same also applied to the quantity of water Ezekiel was to use—the sixth part of a hin, about one and two-thirds of a pint, much below the ordinary requirements of the human body.

The scarcity of food was further indicated by the fuel that was to be used in its preparation; for even fuel would be deficient. Ezekiel was told to use human excrement when baking his scanty allowance of food. He was naturally horrified at such an instruction, and showed his abhorrence in his reply, "Ah Lord God! behold, I have never defiled myself; from my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has foul flesh come into my mouth." The idea was repulsive to him. In response to his protest he was allowed to substitute cows' dung for human dung. At the same time he was told what the instruction was intended to imply. "Son of man", said God to him, "behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, they shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and waste away under their punishment."

A MAN OF SIGN—THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

The fulfilment of the words may be read in the account of the siege recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles. The former records : "On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land."¹ **Jeremiah** has a number of allusions to the scarcity of bread in the closing days of the siege of Jerusalem, and there are several in the Lamentations. The following may be taken as examples:

My eyes are spent with weeping;

My soul is in tumult . . .

Because infants and babes

Faint in the streets of the city.

They cry to their mothers,

"Where is bread and wine?"

As they faint like wounded men

in the streets of the city.

Arise, cry out in the night,

At the beginning of the watches!

Pour out your heart like water

Before the presence of the Lord!

Lift your hands to Him

For the lives of your children,

Who faint for hunger

At the head of every street.²

Still more pathetic are words that come later:

The hands of compassionate women

Have boiled their own children;

They became their food

In the destruction of the daughter of My people.³

In allusions such as these the things foretold by Ezekiel about the shortage of food and water are plainly seen.

¹2 Kings 25, 3; ²Lamentations 2, 11 and 19; ³Ibid. 4 : 10.

EZEKIEL A MAN OF SIGN—AFTER THE SIEGE

(Ezekiel, Chapter 5)

Having pictured the privations that were to be experienced during the siege of the city, Ezekiel was told to perform a number of actions intended to illustrate events that were to follow the fall of the city. He was to do them to cause any who saw him to wonder, and perhaps ask, what they meant. They emphasized the troubles that were to overtake the people after the city had been destroyed.

He was to take a sharp sword and, using it as a razor, pass it over his hair and beard, cutting them off. He was then to divide the hair into three portions, weighing them to see that each represented a third of the total. It was as strange an action as the one he had completed before. One portion was to be burned in the fire on the tile on which he had portrayed the besieged city. Another third was to be smitten with the sword round about the representation of the city, while the rest was to be scattered to the winds, though even that was to be pursued by the sword. From that portion a small section was to be bound up in the skirts of his garment. Some of these were to be cast into the fire and burned, for, he was told, a fire would come forth into all the house of Israel.

The implications of these actions are apparent, and are more or less evident to all who are conversant with the history of Israel. A general explanation follows in the remainder of the chapter. Judgments were to be executed against the people wherever they might be.

The words of the prophet may be quoted: "Thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments in the midst of you in the sight of the nations. And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again."

The story of Israel after the fall of Jerusalem illustrates the picturesque actions of the Prophet. The losses in the siege of Jerusalem must have been enormous: the nation seems to have been urged to the heights of fanaticism in their resistance to the Babylonians. When the city fell multitudes were carried away into Babylon, only the poorest of the peasantry being left in the land of Judah. These were to be tillers of the soil, living under a governor of their own, appointed by the conqueror. But they were not allowed to live in peace. Their history or some of it, may be read in the later chapters of Jeremiah. Many fled to Egypt, thinking to find safety there, but in vain. The sword seemed to pursue them wherever they went or whatever they did.

Little purpose would be served by attempting to sum up the history of the people during the years that followed the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies. Ezekiel pictured some of it, and a quotation from the latter part of the chapter will suffice to indicate the character of their experiences: "I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations round about you, and in the sight of all that pass by. You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror to the nations round about you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury and with furious chastisements, when I loose against you my deadly arrows of famine, arrows of destruction which I will loose to destroy you."

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

True there was a restoration when Cyrus of Persia issued a decree authorizing those who wished to return to their homeland, but only a section of the community took advantage of it. Many elected to stay behind, thinking they would be better off in Babylon. But whatever may have been the experiences of those who stayed, the subsequent history of the descendants of those who returned has only too well answered the sayings of Ezekiel as given in the rest of the chapter now under consideration.

6

JUDAH'S IDOLATRY

(Ezekiel, Chapter 6)

The evils foretold in previous chapters have been attributed to the general iniquities of the people, not to any specific breaches of particular commandments. Israel had changed God's judgments and defiled His sanctuary. The charges have been more or less, general. Now charges of a specific character are to be brought forward, and one particular charge is in this section. Ezekiel was told to say: "You mountains of Israel, thus saith the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys; Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places, your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols. And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter

your bones round about your altars." That is the basis of the judgments to be denounced against the people in this section—high places, altars, incense altars, and idols. All these were associated with the religious customs of the people, and each of them needs to be considered before the chapter in which they are mentioned is examined.

First there were the high places, which in Hebrew were termed *bamah*, a word signifying to be high or lofty. It is applied to heights or hills, and by association to sanctuaries established on such places. It is generally applied to places associated with the worship of idols, though it is sometimes applied to places devoted to the God of Israel—Jehovah. No doubt the custom arose from the idea that the tops of such places were nearer to heaven than were places on the plains. As the gods were supposed to dwell in heaven, the worshippers were nearer to the gods when they were on hills and other exalted sites.

So far as the worship of Jehovah was concerned, an example of such a site is seen on the occasion when Saul, who became King, was seeking his father's asses. When they could not be found, his servant suggested that they should seek the assistance of Samuel, the seer. On asking where he might be found, they were told that he was to eat that day in the high place, for the sacrifice was to be eaten there¹. There is no suggestion that there was anything wrong with the practice. Samuel was a prophet of the Lord, and the whole incident with which the event was connected was over-ruled by God.

At the same time it is clear that the high places were usually associated with the worship of idols or false gods. The people of Canaan, prior to the conquest of the land of Joshua, carried on their worship on the

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

high places, and their worship was usually associated with immoral practices. For this reason the Israelites were commanded to drive out the inhabitants of the land, to destroy their figured stones, their molten images, and to demolish their high places². Notwithstanding this command Israel copied the practice, and the high places are referred to from time to time, though the good kings of the country took steps to destroy them. Hezekiah, for example, removed the high places, broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherim³, a fact of which the Assyrian commander reminded the people of Jerusalem when he spoke to them as they were gathered on the wall of the city. There are indications that Hezekiah's actions were not popular with many of the people. The work had to be done again in the reign of Josiah, who "purged Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the graven and molten images"⁴. Josiah's reformation also was not really accepted, but only "feignedly". As soon as he was dead the old ways were followed.

The incense altars seem to have been devoted to burning of incense to pagan deities, "the abominations of the heathen". The images or idols need no explanation: the former were termed in Hebrew *chammanim*, the singular form of which seems to have been used sometimes for Baal. In the light of what the prophets have said about Baal and its worship, what is said about the whole position can be understood.

The term Ezekiel consistently used to represent idols was not the word usually so translated. It is *gillul*, and comes from the basic word *galal*, which is defined as squanderer, vile, debased, or as given by another lexicographer, to roll like a log. It was a term of derision. To him idols were mere logs of wood, incapable of

movement by their own volition. The term aptly defined the utter uselessness of idols or their worship.

Of the judgments that were coming Ezekiel said, "Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your altar". High places were to be ruined, idols broken, and their worshippers slain. Yet there would be some who would be as a remnant answering to the few hairs which the Prophet was told to bind in the skirt of his robe. They were the few who would remember God among the peoples where they were scattered, and who have realized the loathsomeness of the condition to which their contemporaries had fallen. Something of this was manifested by those who took advantage of the decree issued by Cyrus of Persia authorizing those who so desired, to return to the land of their fathers. Among them were many who manifested a religious fervour, which, however, in many instances did not endure. In the troubles that were about to overtake the people some at least would recognize that the cause was in themselves. Then they would be loathsome in their own sight. As a consequence they would realize that God's warnings through the Prophet had not been in vain.

As the section comes to an end the Prophet renews his words of warning. The troubles that lay ahead were the result of the abominations that had been committed by the house of Israel. They would die by the sword, the land would be wasted, and famine would cause death to consume them. So God would make them realise that He was God. It was a bitter price to pay for acquiring such knowledge. The result would, however, be that they would be compelled to realize that because of their own ways the price had been paid, and they would

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

learn by bitter experience that their fellows had been killed among their idols and by their altars, and on the high places where they had paid their devotions to their images. The whole ends with the statement, "Then they will know that I, Jehovah, am the Lord".

History has recorded how the doom came about. The history of Judah during the reign of Zedekiah is a record of vacillation on the part of the king; of the persecution of prophets by the princes of the state, who answered to the "bad figs" shown to Jeremiah in Jerusalem. Growing scarcity was experienced in the city until the final assault by the Babylonians brought the siege to an end.

¹1 Sam. 9 : 9-14; ²Num. 33 : 52; ³2 Kings 18 : 4.

⁴2 Chron. 34 : 3.

7

THE APPROACHING END OF THE KINGDOM

(Ezekiel, Chapter 7)

Ezekiel's prophecies now anticipate the events that signified the outcome of the first section of his prophecies. It records the ominous words addressed to the Prophet : "An end ! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end upon you." The insistence of the words "the end" must strike every reader; it prepares for the words that follow, with their insistence on such phrases as "Disaster after disaster"; "An end is come"; "your doom has come"; "the time has

come"; "the day is near". There could be no misunderstanding the nature of the message to be conveyed. The key-note was disaster; the atmosphere was one of gloom.

The first portion of the chapter strikes the note that characterizes the whole. "Thus saith the Lord God: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. An end has come, the end is come, it has awakened against you, Behold, it comes. Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land; the time has come, the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of joyful shouting upon the mountains." The words suggest the contrast between anticipation and realization. For some reason the defenders of the city seem to have completely misread the signs of the times. Contrary to every element in the situation, the people misinterpreted their own weakness and the strength of the Babylonian armies. They neglected the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah in Jerusalem, and the sayings of Ezekiel, if the latter reached them. Hence the insistence of Ezekiel. The staccato tones of what follows add to the impressiveness of the words. "Behold the day! Behold, it comes! Your doom has come; injustice has blossomed, pride has budded. Violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness; none of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be pre-eminence among them; the time has come, the day draws near."

Here the Prophet proceeds to tell of the changes that would be experienced among the various classes of the community. Buyers would not rejoice over their purchases for they would be useless. Sellers would not mourn, a somewhat strange statement as sellers usually hope to gain on their sales, but there would be nothing

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

to rejoice over; whatever they had gained would be of no value to them. As Ezekiel said, "Wrath is upon the multitude, none can maintain his life" !

At this point Ezekiel explained the reason for what he had said. There would be a complete breakdown in the defence. The trumpet would be sounded, but no one would heed and go out to meet the enemy. Within the city was pestilence and famine; without was the sword of the enemy ! If those in the city attempted to escape they would be on the mountains moaning like the doves in the valley, unable to defend themselves. All hands would be feeble; horror and shame would be on every side. Then the Prophet turned to the actions of those who attempted to escape. Money would have no value; it would not appease their hunger. In their flight beautiful ornaments in which they had taken pride, or which, perchance, they had intended to use to decorate their images, would be valueless; they would not satisfy their hunger ! God would not help them; His face was turned from them. In the past they had turned from Him, now He had turned from them.

So the matter proceeds to the end, with another explanation of the cause of the trouble, and a fresh staccato section. The cause ? The land was full of bloody crimes and the city full of violence. The worst of the peoples would take possession of the houses which had been deserted by their inhabitants, and would profane the holy places. In their extremity the people would seek peace, but there would be none; it was too late ! Then more staccato. Disaster comes upon disaster. Rumour follows rumour. Visions are sought from the prophets. Guidance from the priests. Counsel from the elders. But all would be in vain.

So the end would come, an end seen in vision by

Ezekiel, described in all its horrors by Jeremiah. The national historians describe it in as few words as possible; it was painted in all its horrors by Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations. If one wishes to realize the siege and capture of the city of Jerusalem, there is no better description than that contained in the book of Lamentations.

8

PROFANATION OF THE TEMPLE

(Ezekiel, Chapter 8)

In the eighth chapter of Ezekiel a new series of visions is commenced. In contrast with the Visions of God, with which the book opened, the visions have to do with the corruptions of men. More than a year had elapsed since Ezekiel received his call to become a prophet of the Lord, which had led to the pronouncement of the messages already considered, some of which he had delivered to the captives. Now he received something like a repetition, though on a much smaller scale, of the visions he had described before.

The Prophet was seated in his own house, with some at least of the elders of Judah sitting before him. Suddenly Ezekiel felt the hand of the Lord God fall upon him, and he saw a form that had the appearance of a man. He was, apparently, seated on what Ezekiel describes as a fire, while above him there was a brightness as of gleaming bronze. No further particulars are

given, except that the "man" put forth the form of a hand and took Ezekiel by a lock of his hair, and "the Spirit" lifted him up between earth and heaven and brought him in the "visions of God" to Jerusalem. There Ezekiel was taken to the temple, to the entrance of a gateway of the inner court. There, within the precincts of the most sacred building in the city was "the image of jealousy that provokes to jealousy". There, too, was the glory of the God of Israel, like the vision Ezekiel had seen before. The image was, presumably, that of one of the false gods worshipped by inhabitants of the city. Long before, God had spoken of idol gods in this way, saying, "They (the people of Israel) have stirred me to jealousy with that which is no god; they have provoked me with their idols". It was bad enough to see the people of Jerusalem worshipping idols; to do so in the precincts of the temple devoted to God Himself was worse.

As the Prophet stood there God said to him, "Son of man, dig in the wall". He did so, and through the wall he saw a door. Then he was told to go in and see what vile abominations were being committed. When he went in he saw portrayed on the wall all kinds of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. By the side of the drawings, seventy of the elders were congregated each with a censer in his hand, while clouds of incense ascended before the representations of the vilest forms of false worship. The description of these gods suggests that the people had adopted some of the gods of Egypt. For some time Israel had been looking to Egypt for assistance in their conflict with Babylon. Actually Egypt had always failed to help; it was always too late, or when it did make some show of assistance had failed to accomplish

anything of value. As the Prophet looked at the scene the voice of God came to him, saying, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his room of pictures? They say, "The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land". Then He added, "You will see still greater abominations which they commit".

He was then taken to the north gate where he saw women of Israel weeping for Tammuz. This time the sight indicated the confusion of ideas entertained by the people. The idolatrous pictures portrayed on the wall were representations of objects worshipped by the Egyptians; Tammuz was essentially of Babylonian origin. Israel was evidently ready to adopt objects of worship other peoples revered. Egypt looked strong; Babylon was strong; hence the gods worshipped by either of them must be strong.

Tammuz was the Babylonian Damuzi, the husband and the son of Ishtar, the Babylonian Venus. He was a sun-god and his worshippers believed that he was killed as winter succeeded autumn. Ishtar mourned his loss, and was supposed to have descended into the nether regions in search of him. Each year the mourners assembled to mourn his death; later, when his resurrection took place with the return of summer, it was celebrated with extravagant scenes of rejoicing. The myth of Tammuz passed into the religious ideas of many peoples. As with many other forms of pagan worship the mourning and the rejoicing were occasions of licentiousness. Milton has referred to this in the words,

The love tale
 Infected Zion's daughters with like heat,
 Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch
 Ezekiel saw.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Yet that was not all. Ezekiel was next taken into the inner court of the temple, where, standing between the porch and the altar, he saw twenty-five men standing with their backs to the temple and their faces directed to the east, worshipping the sun. In those dark days the people seem to have been ready to adopt any worship that might induce one or other of the pagan gods to come to their assistance. Jehovah seemed to have forgotten them!

To the various false worships that had been introduced into the very centre of true worship, other abominations were added. The land was filled with violence; all ordinary restraints were cast aside. Ezekiel brings his catalogue of their ways to an end with the charge, "Lo, they put the branch to their nose". The practice so described has been the subject of much speculation and nothing definite seems to have been determined. It was evidently a practice associated with some extreme elements of objection, though it is impossible to say definitely to what it refers. The ivy had some association with the worship of Bacchus in later times in the west; whether there was any connection with the practice referred to, however, cannot be said.

RETRIBUTION

(*Ezekiel, Chapters 9 : 1-11 : 13*)

When pagan practices such as those that have been mentioned were carried on in the temple of the Lord, the apostasy of the people must have reached its limits. The religious customs and ordinances defined by Moses, and practised in the early days of the monarchy, had been forgotten. The situation called forth the next scene described by Ezekiel. It was introduced by what the Prophet described as God calling and saying, "Draw near, you executioners of the city, each with his slaughtering weapon in his hand". At this call six men came from the gate, each with a "weapon for slaughter" in his hand. With them was another individual clothed in linen, and carrying a writing case. The seven men then stood beside the bronze (usually referred to as the brazen) altar.

By this time the "glory of the God of Israel" had left the basis on which it had rested and was standing by the threshold of the temple. From there he addressed the man with the writing case and told him to go through the city and set a mark on the foreheads of the men who grieved over the abominations practised by their fellows. The six were then instructed to pass through the city and slay old men, young men and maidens, little children and women, but to spare everyone who had been marked by the man with the writing-case. After that the executioners were told to defile the house itself, filling its courts with the slain.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Ezekiel raised some objections to the command, but was told the guilt of Israel and Judah was so great, and the land so full of blood and injustice, that God would neither spare nor have pity. The next recorded event was the return of the man with the writing-case to report that the instructions given had been carried out.

An important lesson is to be learned from the incident: it concerns the providential care extended by God to those who fear Him. His arm is not shortened; He can, and will, protect those who trust Him and obey His precepts. In the calamities that overwhelmed the nation during the last few years of its history, the providence of God ensured the safety of those who feared Him. An example of the principle may be seen in the prophet Jeremiah. When the city fell Nebuchadnezzar gave instructions that he was to be well treated, and given an opportunity to choose where he would reside; he might go to Babylon, or he might go anywhere he desired¹. The same principle was evidenced some hundreds of years later when the Romans destroyed the city. Following the instructions Jesus had given in his Mount Olivet prophecy, they took advantage of a lull in the siege of the city and fled to Pella to the east of the Jordan.

There can be no misunderstanding the vision or what it portended. The residue of Israel who had been left in the land when Jehoiachin and others had been carried away, and who flattered themselves that they were immune from punishment, were to drink the cup of God's wrath, draining it to the dregs. They had said, "The Lord has forsaken the earth", from which they inferred that they might do as they pleased. Consequently they had filled the land with perversity.

Slaughter was not the only way in which the guilty were to be punished. An alternative was recorded by Jeremiah. Nebuzaradan, the captain of Nebuchadrezzar's bodyguard, burned the house of the Lord, the king's house and those of the people, and carried the important persons in the country away to Babylon, leaving the poorest of the land behind to look after the cultivation of the country, to act as vinedressers and husbandmen². The king of Babylon had no intention of leaving the land empty; he needed tribute from the country. A desolate land would produce none; hence the policy of sparing the poor of the land. It seemed a natural course to adopt, yet God was in the matter.

It is for this reason that at this point the Visions of God and of the cherubim are reintroduced. As Ezekiel looked he saw something like a sapphire. It resembled a throne, and from it came a voice addressed to the man with the writing-case. It said, "Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim, fill your hands with burning coals and scatter them over the city". The man went in and stood beside one of the wheels, and a cherub took some of the fire and gave it to the man. The word translated "whirling wheels" is in the singular; it therefore fits in with the form of address, "O wheel". The fire was to result in the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. The cherubim and the wheels represented God. The whole circumstances might seem to be the result of human policies and ambitions; yet God was behind it all, and so brought about the fulfilment of His words through Jeremiah, "I will kindle a fire in its (Jerusalem's) gates and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and shall not be quenched".³ The result is pictured in the words,

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

“The Lord gave full vent to His wrath,
He poured out His hot anger;
And He kindled a fire in Zion
Which consumed its foundations.⁴

It is a view of history that is not usually recognised, but it is a true one.

As this section of the prophecies of Ezekiel approaches its end, the symbols reach their climax. The people of Jerusalem regarded the city as impregnable. Why they should have done so is not clear in view of what had happened within their own memories.

Ezekiel was brought to the eastern gate of the temple where a number of men were assembled, two of whom are named, Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah. As their names are given they were presumably men of importance, possibly members of the ruling classes in the state. It is possible that the former was a brother of Hananiah who opposed Jeremiah, and died in accordance with the saying of that prophet.⁵ God gave Ezekiel a message concerning them: “Son of man”, He said, “these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in the city, who say ‘The time is not near to build houses; this city is the cauldron, and we are the flesh’”. Ezekiel was told to prophesy against them and to say, speaking not to the two but to all who were standing by, “Thus saith the Lord God, Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the cauldron; but you will be brought out of the midst of it. You have feared the sword, and I shall bring the sword upon you”.

The idea of Jaazaniah and his companions seems to have been that the time was not one to enter upon building operations; it was a time when everything should be subordinated to preparing for war and defence.

Building operations were for times of peace. The reference to being the flesh inside the cauldron was perhaps their way of expressing the modern proverb "Out of the frying-pan into the fire"; it was better to be in the cauldron than in the fire. Ezekiel accepted their simile of the cauldron but changed the application. His representation of the situation was "Your slain whom ye have lain in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the cauldron; but you shall be brought out of the midst of it", and delivered into the hands of strangers. There may be some question what Jaazaniah and his friends had in mind. Had they, or some of their abettors, put some who opposed their policy to death, leaving them in the open street (the cauldron), as a kind of object lesson to those who were in favour of submission to the Babylonians? Whatever may have been their intention Ezekiel said something more, declaring that God would judge them in the border of Israel. In the circumstances, he added, "This city shall not be your cauldron, nor shall you be the flesh in the midst of it; I will judge you at the border of Israel". The effect of his words was impressed on his hearers by the fact that while he was speaking Pelatiah died. Whatever effect his death had upon those who sympathised with him, Ezekiel was moved to cry out, "Ah Lord God ! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"

¹Jer. 40 : 1-5.

²Jer. 52 : 12-16; ³Jer. 17 : 27; ⁴Lamentations 4 : 11.

⁵Jer. 28 : 10-17.

THE JEWS OF JERUSALEM AND THE JEWS IN EXILE

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 11 : 14-25*)

Before closing the prophecies which are associated with the Visions of God, the Prophet had something to say about the Jews who were still in Jerusalem and the surrounding country and those already in captivity. Contrary to the intention of Jeremiah's illustration, the Jews in the land considered themselves to be the good figs and supposed that the captives had been taken to Babylon because they belonged to the bad variety¹. Having been removed from Judah and the city in which the temple stood, they regarded the captives as outside the influence of God. The possession of the land had been given to those who were still in it : they were the people ! It was, of course, a materialistic conception of God. To them He was the God of Judea, and His jurisdiction was confined to that land, therefore Jews who had been removed to Babylon were outside his people.

The idea underlying such a conception was held generally by the peoples of that time; Chemosh, for example, was the god of Moab. The Jews in Jerusalem who talked in this way forgot the truth expressed in the time of Moses that God is "the God of the spirits of all flesh"². They were heedless, too, of the words of Jeremiah: "The Lord is the true God, he is the living God and the everlasting King . . . It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom"³ ; He is "the former of all things".

THE JEWS OF JERUSALEM AND THE JEWS IN EXILE

In their arrogance they denied the right of those who had been carried away to have anything to do with the land of their fathers. It belonged to the people who lived on it! In view of their attitude it is significant that the first promise of good in the writings of Ezekiel concerned the exiles. It reads as follows: "Though I removed them far off among the nations, and I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone. Therefore say, 'Thus saith the Lord, I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel' "4. The promise is the more remarkable when it is remembered that the sanctuary in Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, while the captives would find a refuge in God himself. That God was a sanctuary to some at least of those in Babylon is evidenced by the exiles who expressed the thoughts found in the Psalm—

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept,

When we remembered Zion . . .

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

Let my right hand wither !

Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth

If I do not remember you,

If I do not set Jerusalem

Above my chief joy.⁵

God was real to one who could write in such terms.

The promise given through Ezekiel went further: "When they come there", that is to Jerusalem, "they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them, and they shall be my people and I will be their God."

The captivity in Babylon produced a change in some at least of the exiles. Before they were carried away the majority had been unfaithful to God; when the return was made possible a new spirit was manifested in them. Although the return was associated with many failures, the charge of idolatry was never again urged against them. Even in Babylon men like Ezra set themselves to a study of the law of God in a way that, probably, had never before been attempted.

The prophecies associated with Ezekiel's transport in spirit were brought to an end with a symbolic incident. The cherubim appear once more with all that symbolized the glory of God. They lifted up their wings, with the wheels, and the glory of God went up with them. The Visions of God left the scene and stood on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The meaning is obvious: God had forsaken the city of His choice in which He had placed His name. Nothing could now save the city from its fate. At the same time the Spirit lifted Ezekiel and brought him back to Chaldea to the exiles there. The vision was over for a time, and Ezekiel told the exiles all the things God had shown him.

¹Jer. 24; ²Num. 16 : 22; ³Jer. 10 : 10-12; ⁴Ezek. 11 : 16 and 17.

⁵Psalms 137.

THE SIGN OF AN EMIGRANT

(Ezekiel, Chapter 12)

The twelfth chapter of Ezekiel pictures the prophet enacting the sign of an emigrant. It was intended to convey a lesson to the exiles of something that was to happen in Jerusalem. It is the first of a number of signs given by the prophet or expressed by him in words.

The word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear but hear not". The prophet was to enact a part that might lead the people to understand what they failed to see, or to hear, when he spoke to them. He was to act in an unusual way, and lead them to wonder what his actions portended; perhaps to ask him.

He was to act as an emigrant would, though in doing so he would do some things an ordinary emigrant would not do. God said to him, "Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house". It was only a "perhaps".

First Ezekiel was to prepare for himself an exile's baggage, doing that in the daylight in the sight of the people. Then he was to go from his place to another, still acting in the sight of the people in the daytime. Then in the evening he was to bring the baggage out of the house, bearing it on his shoulder, and carrying it through the darkness. Then he was to dig through the wall. He was to do this also at night, covering his face so that he might not see the land. He was to do all this as "a sign for the house of Israel". Ezekiel did as he was instructed:

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

he brought out his baggage by day, and in the evening he dug through the wall and went forth in the dark, carrying his outfit on his shoulder in the sight of his neighbours.

Before considering what was intended to be represented by Ezekiel's strange behaviour it will be well to consider what wall he was to dig through; it might have been the wall of his house, or some other wall, perhaps the wall of a city. In the record so far as has been reviewed there has been nothing to indicate what it was. The explanation given him, however, indicates that it was the wall of the city. The whole action was an acted parable, and in view of the explanation he was given that must have been the wall intended; he had already removed from his house.

The next thing recorded was a further message from God during the following morning. Some of his neighbours had asked "What are you doing?" and he was told to reply, "Thus says the Lord God, This oracle concerns the Prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it". What Ezekiel had done, the Prince was to do. He would bear a burden on his shoulder and go forth in the dark, he would cover his face and dig through a wall. Jeremiah has recorded the actions of king Zedekiah in the following extract from his record: "Then a breach was made in the city; and all the men of war fled and went out from the city by night by the way of a gate between two walls, by the king's garden, while the Chaldeans were round about the city". Zedekiah was with them, but his effort to escape from the Babylonians failed. He was pursued and taken to the King of Babylon.

In the words of the Prophet this was due to God, who, continuing his words to Ezekiel, said "I will spread

my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it; and he shall die there." It was the end of the siege; the city was taken and destroyed.

One feature of the incident ranges round the words of Ezekiel; "I will bring him (the king) to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it; and he shall die there." When Zedekiah was captured by the Babylonian army as he attempted to flee, he was taken to Rablah where the Babylonian king had established his camp. There Nebuchadrezzar probably reminded Zedekiah of the oath he had taken and broken. Then he gave instructions for his sons to be put to death in the presence of their father; then numbers of the king's princes and nobles were slaughtered before him. Finally Zedekiah's eyes were put out. The whole idea was inhuman and must always be regarded as a blot on the memory of Nebuchadrezzar. The last thing seen by Zedekiah was the murder of his sons, who must have been young men, or youths, and of the men who had spurred him on in his resistance. Equally tragic was the plight of the people; sword, famine, pestilence took their toll of them, and the rest, except the poor of the land, were taken to Babylon. Some gained a sort of respite by flight only to experience the evils that had been represented by the treatment of the prophet's hairs, as foretold in the instructions given when he represented on a tile the siege of Jerusalem.

One other significant saying of the prophet is recorded at this point. "Son of man", God said to him, "what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, 'The days grow long and every vision comes to naught?' Tell them, therefore, Thus says the Lord God, I will put an end to this proverb and they

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

shall no more use it in Israel". He was to say to them, "The days are at hand and the fulfilment of every vision". All that God had said was to be experienced. All flattering visions were to fail. "It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it".

Another significant action by Ezekiel is mentioned here. He was told "Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling and with fearfulness, and say of the people of the land . . . They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink water in dismay, because their land will be stripped of all it contains on account of all it contains." "All the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

Notwithstanding all the Prophet had said, the people refused to believe him. They put his words away, saying "The vision that he sees is for many days hence, he prophecies of times far off." It was another example of the saying "It won't be in my time, nor in yours." Someday perhaps, but not now. "Therefore", said God, "none of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word which I speak will be performed". The words were definite. Israel would no longer be able to rely on vain words. They might use augury, hoping to find some comfort, but events would soon make it impossible. A few years later the words of doom spoken by Ezekiel were fulfilled.

FALSE PROPHETS

(Ezekiel, Chapter 13)

False prophets were no new experience in the history of Israel. As far back as the days of Moses they had been in existence. They would sometimes speak in the name of God; sometimes they might speak in the name of other gods. The times of Ezekiel and Jeremiah were particularly marked by them. The uncertainties of the times, the hopes and fears that marked them, encouraged would-be prophets to attempt to forecast the future. In such times prophets who foretold smooth things were welcomed: the days were dark, the future uncertain, and most people like to be assured that better times are just round the corner. Hence the sayings of Ezekiel recorded in this section of his writings.

The message that came to Ezekiel was "Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing." The original name for a prophet in Israel was "the Seer". Those who professed to be prophets were mostly men who had not "seen", but imagined things out of their own minds. In the words communicated to Ezekiel, they were like foxes among ruins; they had talked out of their own imaginings but had done nothing to prepare the nation to meet the troubles that lay ahead. Instead, they had spoken falsehood and divined lies. In His message God said "Have they not seen a delusive vision?" They said "Thus saith the Lord" when God had not spoken to them. "Smooth things" did nothing to meet the dangers of the situation.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was very definite in his charges against them. They misled the people, saying there would be peace when there was no peace. He drew a picturesque picture of their efforts; the people built a wall, as it were, for their defence, and the prophets daubed it with whitewash! Such a procedure was useless; a deluge of rain, accompanied by great hailstones and a stormy wind, would not only remove the whitewash, it would also cause the wall to fall. Such a stormy wind was coming. The language was picturesque and its meaning obvious. It is worth noting that the word translated "wall" is not that one generally used, indeed it is only used here; it seems to have the idea of a slight wall or partition. Such a construction would not keep the Babylonians out!

In the second portion of the chapter Ezekiel turns to false prophetesses, whom he describes as "the daughters of the people who prophesied out of their own minds". The description of them is somewhat strange; they sewed magic bands upon all wrists, and made veils for the heads of persons of every stature in their hunt for souls. The purpose for these strange elements on their clothing is not known; they were evidently worn to attract attention. They profaned God among the people for "handfuls of barley and pieces of bread". Apparently their prophesyings were not considered to be of much value¹. For such a pittance they were prepared to put persons to death who should not die, and keep alive those who should not live. But their ways were to be brought to an end; God would deliver His people out of their hands.

¹Samuel 2 : 36.

THE HOPELESSNESS OF JUDAH

(Ezekiel, Chapter 14)

The matters referred to in this section arose out of the sayings concerning the false prophets. Certain elders among the exiles came and sat down before Ezekiel. What their object was is not stated. Presumably they desired to obtain some information, but before they could speak God spoke to Ezekiel about them. He said, "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces; should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?" They had evidently come with preconceived ideas, which they hoped he would confirm. Ezekiel was therefore told to tell them that any one who took his idols into his heart and came to a prophet, and kept the stumbling block of his iniquity before him, would be answered by God Himself. Evidently, the elders had not come to Ezekiel with open minds to receive a reply.

In the circumstances God said He would answer the elders or any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who were among them; He would set His face against such a one, and make him a sign and a bye word. He would even go so far as to deceive a prophet who came, as it were, with his idols in his heart. The deceiving would be a judicial one; a way of bringing punishment upon him, or upon any guilty people. The object would be to bring the people into a state of mind in which they would cease to defile themselves by their transgressions.

Some have felt a difficulty in this; it has seemed to be unjust. Such an attitude shows that the objector has failed to appreciate all the facts of the case. No true prophet would be treated in that way; only false prophets were in view. When such men, or women, elected to speak out of their own consciousness while professing that they were inspired by God, they were deceiving others. They spoke what they imagined in their own minds and endeavoured to make their hearers believe they were speaking the words of God. They were causing the house of Israel to go astray. The object in view was that the house of Israel might see that the prophets were speaking out of their own minds and not the words of God.

With a people situated as Israel were at that time no ordinary methods were likely to save them. There was trouble on every hand, false prophets were eagerly listened to, true prophets were disregarded, the people were heading for destruction. These were the circumstances which led to the word of the Lord: "Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, even if these three men Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness". Noah, the preacher of righteousness in a world completely astray; Daniel, a man greatly beloved, who in a foreign land refused to partake of food that had, probably, been offered to idols; and Job, whose prayers saved his friends from the results of saying of God things that were not right! Even the combination of these three would not have sufficed to save Judah in the days of Ezekiel. So definitely was that the case that the saying was repeated with the addition "they would deliver neither son nor daughter".

THE HOPELESSNESS OF JUDAH

The section ends with a statement introduced by the words, "How much more!" How much more when God would send upon Jerusalem His four sore acts of judgment, sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! Yet there was a proviso. "If there should be left in it any survivors to lead out sons or daughters, when they come forth to you, and you see their ways and their doings, you will be consoled for the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem . . . They will console you when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, says the Lord God". The saying is a foretaste of the words of Paul in his letter to the Romans—"The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."¹

¹Romans 11 : 29.

14

THE WOOD OF THE VINE

(Ezekiel, Chapter 15)

The gleam of hope with which the previous section came to an end was not to be realized in the time of the Prophet. That is made clear in the parable of the wood of the vine which follows. It is a short section and needs little comment.

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel asking a question, "How does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest?" The question has its foundation in the fact that

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

the vine was a well known symbol of Israel. Ezekiel was speaking to people who were conversant with the symbol of a vine as applicable to them as a nation. The symbol went back to the earliest days of Israel's association with the land. When spies were sent to examine the country before the people entered it, a bunch of grapes was brought back to indicate the character of the land. A Psalmist and a prophet used the simile in later times. The former said of it:

Thou (God) didst bring a vine out of Egypt;

Thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.

Thou didst clear the ground for it;

It took deep root and filled the land.¹

Isaiah, too, had sung a song concerning it, comparing Israel to a vineyard planted on a very fruitful hill, which God had tended with great care. But the vines had failed to produce grapes that could be eaten or made into wine. All it produced were wild grapes.²

The sole purpose for which a vine was cultivated was to produce grapes. Trees might be used to provide timber for various purposes, but the wood of the vine was useless, it was not even used to form a pin! It could only be used as fuel for a fire. Ezekiel drew the moral, "Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which is given to the fire for fuel, so will I give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them; and you will know that I am the Lord."

¹Psalm 80 : 8 and 9. ²Isa. Chap. 5.

THE ANCESTRY AND CONDUCT OF
JERUSALEM*(Ezekiel, Chapter 16)*

The opening words of this chapter may come as a surprise to many; the city is so associated with the history of Israel that its early history is apt to be overlooked. Ezekiel, however, was only speaking rightly when, addressing Jerusalem, he said "Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite". When God first promised to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham, a number of peoples were inhabitants of the land. Among them were Hittites, Amorites, and Jebusites¹. When Israel invaded the land Jerusalem was in the possession of the Jebusites. In the record of the conquest it is recorded that the king of Jerusalem, Adonizedek, with various other kinglets in the south of the land of Canaan, made cause against the Gibeonites because they had made peace with Israel. Joshua fought against the confederate kings, defeated them and put them to death. Whatever may have been the reason, Jerusalem was not occupied by Israel, for later the tribe of Judah fought Jerusalem and set it on fire², though nothing is said about taking possession of it, and it did not become the capital of the land until the time of David. Not till then did it become the "place in which the Lord God's name was placed"³. Until that time it remained a Canaanite city. Such an origin was very unpromising, it is represented by Ezekiel in the words "on the day you were born your navel string was

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

not cut, nor were you washed with water, to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed with bands". It was like a babe cast out in the open field, left to grow up without attention. Of its history in its early years very little is known; it was not until it was taken by Joab in the time of David that it became Zion, David's headquarters, and in the reign of Solomon, the site of the temple of God. By that time the first favourable thing was said to it "Live and grow up like a plant of the field".

From the time it became incorporated into the kingdom of David it entered upon a new state of existence. God spread His skirt over the city; He "placed His name there" as he had promised. The meaning of the expression is illustrated by an incident in the relations of Boaz and Ruth. On the occasion when Ruth entered the threshing floor of Boaz, and he "spread his skirt over her" she became his betrothed. So in the case of Jerusalem, it ceased to be a city of the Canaanites, and became the city of God, the Zion of the holy One of Israel. As Ezekiel expressed it, God plighted His troth to it, entered into a covenant with it, and it became His. Jerusalem was as a maiden betrothed. In the language of Ezekiel she was washed and anointed with oil, clothed with embroidered cloth, swathed with fine linen and covered with silk, and given fine flour, honey and milk for sustenance. She was given a beautiful crown, raised to regal estate, so that her renown spread among the surrounding nations. As the Chronicler said, "Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom, and all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon." Jerusalem reached the highest point of its glory.⁴

Suddenly the picture drawn by Ezekiel changes,

and the change is startling. "But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer by". The beautiful garments that God had provided were used to make "gaily decked shrines" where the inhabitants "played the harlot", and that to such an extent that God said that "the like had never been, nor should ever be". No purpose would be served by recounting all the charges made against the city, one or two will suffice. Jerusalem "built herself a vaulted chamber, and made herself a lofty place in every square; at the head of every street she built her lofty place and prostituted her beauty, offering herself to every passer-by, and multiplying her harlotry". The "lofty place" was an arched chamber such as was to be found in heathen temples. Among the Latins they were known as *fornix*, a word from which our word fornication is derived, a sufficient indication of the purposes to which such places were put. The whole conception was opposed to the worship that had been centred in the temple of Jerusalem. As the Prophet expressed it, "You (the people of Jerusalem) played the harlot with the Egyptians your lustful neighbours . . . You played the harlot also with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable . . . You multiplied your harlotry also with the trading land of Chaldea; and even with this you were not satisfied".

No purpose would be served by going through the chapter; the depth of depravity is reached when the prophet proceeds to say "How lovesick is your heart, says the Lord God, seeing you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot . . . Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned hire. Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all harlots; but you gave your gifts to all your

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side for your harlotries”.

No wonder the prophet broke in, “Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord . . . Because your shame was laid bare and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotries with your lovers, . . I will gather all your lovers from every side . . . And I will judge you as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged.” So the Prophet pictured the judgment, that would overtake the city; God would requite their deeds on their own head.

Before the section ends another aspect is referred to. It contains some interesting considerations concerning the future. Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom are regarded as sisters, members of one family. The word daughters is derived from the word *banah*, to build, introducing once more the saying, “your mother was a Hittite, and your father an Amorite,” the Prophet adds, “Your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters.” In the past Sodom had been depicted as completely abandoned in conduct, yet now it was said, “Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done”. The sins of Sodom were pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, and a neglect to aid the poor and needy. The people were haughty, and committed abominable deeds, and for these things were destroyed. Samaria did not commit such sins as Jerusalem had done ; it had not had a single king to lift the people above the common level, whereas Jerusalem had good kings who did right in the sight of the Lord. Therefore Jerusalem must bear its disgrace.

Some difficulty may be found in appreciating the

THE ANCESTRY AND CONDUCT OF JUDAH

Prophet's comparisons. It must be remembered that Sodom and its associated cities were of Canaanite origin; they had no connection with the race of Abraham, and no knowledge of his God. With regard to Samaria, as already pointed out, from the time of the rebellion of the northern tribes against Rehoboam, none rose above the standard of Jeroboam "who made Israel to sin". There was, therefore, some excuse for the consistently low level of the people's conduct. True there had been prophets like Elijah and Elisha, but Judah had an Isaiah, a Micah, and a Jeremiah, as well as the kings who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.

The section ends with a note of hope. Sodom and Samaria were to return to their former estate, and there was hope for Judah, for the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance. The necessary punishment would come, but in the end the gifts and calling would be realized. After all the punishment that was due had been experienced, God said, "I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant." Judah too will call certain things to remembrance and be ashamed of her doings in the past. So the record finishes with hope, Sodom and Samaria will be as daughters, not sisters. The change of relationship will be in accord with the change in the supreme position in the future. God's covenant will be centred in Jerusalem, and its people will never again open their mouths in rebellion. When the covenant with David becomes an established fact,

The beams that shine from Zion's hill
Shall lighten every land;
The king that reigns in Salem's towers
Shall all the world command.

¹Gen. 15 : 16-21; ²Judges 1 : 8; ³Deut. 12 : 5; ⁴2 Chron. 9 : 22-24.

A RIDDLE AND AN ALLEGORY

(Ezekiel, Chapter 17)

This section opens with the words, "Son of man, propound a riddle and speak an allegory to the house of Israel." The theme of the riddle, or allegory, is the history of the royal house of Judah during the last few years of the monarchy, although the history is abbreviated. The background is in the actions of two eagles in their relation to the history of the people. The eagles are first mentioned. Both are identified in the explanation given in the chapter.

The first eagle is said to have been a great one, with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colours. The description is apt, for in the explanation that is given later it represented the power of Babylon, the greatest power among the peoples of the time. The eagle went to Lebanon and took away the topmost twigs of the cedar which it took to a land of trade and set in a city of merchants. It then took of "the seed of the land" which it planted in a fertile soil, placing it beside abundant waters. It was like a willow twig, but it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, sending its roots toward the eagle, and putting forth branches and foliage.

In the explanation that follows, the allegory found its application in the history of the relations of Babylon and Israel as recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles and in more detail in Jeremiah. The allegory commences with incidents that occurred in the reign of

Jehoiakim, who was established as king by Pharaoh of Egypt, but was conquered by Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon a few years later. Rebelling against his suzerain, Jehoiakim was deposed by the Babylonian king, and his brother Mattaniah was made king in his place. The new king's name was changed to Zedekiah, an oath of allegiance to Babylon was exacted from him. He was therefore king of a subordinate kingdom, drawing his authority from the Babylonian monarch. In the words of the allegory, Judah's branches were bent towards Babylon.

At this stage the second eagle appears on the scene. It was also a great bird with great wings and much plumage, though there is no mention of long pinions, nor was it of "many colours". It was obviously of lesser strength and prestige than the first eagle. Yet the "low spreading vine" directed its branches toward it. The second eagle was Egypt, the one nation of the time that might possibly challenge the supremacy of Babylon, though anyone conversant with the circumstances of the two powers would realise that it was decidedly inferior to Babylon in power. There is little doubt that the action of Zedekiah as represented in the allegory was instigated by members of his court more than by his own ideas. Ezekiel summed up the position in the words, "Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its branches?" He pictures the futility of Zedekiah's action when he added, "Behold, when it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed whereon it grew?"

In the explanation that follows the allegory, Ezekiel made clear what would result from the actions of Zedekiah and Judah. In giving the explanation he

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

emphasized the fact that Zedekiah had taken an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadrezzar. Many of the chief men of Judah had been taken to Babylon, that Judah might be humble, and by keeping the covenant Zedekiah had entered into, the kingdom might stand. But in seeking the help of Egypt, sending to Pharaoh for horses and chariots, he was breaking his covenant undertaking. Consequently God said, through the Prophet, "As I live, in the place where the king dwells who made him (Zedekiah) king . . . in Babylon he shall die." He despised his oath and broke the covenant. As a result the final calamity would follow, the pick of the troops belonging to Zedekiah's army would fall by the sword, and his survivors would be scattered.

There the allegory ended so far as it was concerned with the present and the immediate future, but that was not the end of what the prophet had to say. There was a further allegory to announce—a far reaching one to which attention must be paid. While it carries on the figure of the cedar tree its allegorical meaning reached far away into the future, and related to something which God will do, for He says "I will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar" the cedar which has to do with the royal house of Judah.

In the things represented in this part of the allegory no Gentile powers are to act; it is a work of God, who is the speaker. "*I myself* will take a sprig from the lofty cedar. and will set it out: I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain, on the mountain height of Israel will I plant it". Whatever the outcome of the allegory may be, it will be the work of God Himself: the "I" is emphatic. It is also to be noted that

the "sprig" is to be taken from the lofty top of the tree, which God will break off. The allegory is essentially Messianic. The statement that the twig will be a tender one reminds the reader of Isaiah's allusion to a tender plant, for the tender twig is to become a tree. The words in Isaiah are, "To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young (A.V. tender) plant, and like a root out of a dry ground"¹. The two similes are too much alike to leave any doubt that there is a parallel between them.

The sprig is to be taken by God from the lofty top of the cedar. One of the early promises of the Messiah is found in the words addressed to David: "I (God) will raise up your son after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . I will be his father, and he shall be my son . . . Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me: your throne shall be established for ever"². It is to be noted that the son of whom this was said was to be raised up when David's days were fulfilled and he was sleeping with his fathers. The "tender plant" appeared and was rejected by his contemporaries, but nothing could prevent the purpose of God being achieved; hence it will in due time be planted on the height of Israel where it will become a noble cedar, under whose boughs all kinds of birds and beasts will rest. In other words, the reign of the Messiah will stretch from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

The whole purpose is summed up in the words with which the allegory closes. "And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I, the Lord have spoken,

and I will do it." Thus on the ruins of all earthly kingdoms the Kingdom of God will be established, and the prayer will be answered, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

¹Isa. 53 : 1 and 2; ²2 Sam. 7 : 12-16.

17

EATING SOUR GRAPES

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 18*)

The riddle, or allegory, is followed by a proverb expressed by the people of Israel. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The implication was that the ways of God were not equal. From one point of view there seemed to be some basis for the proverb, for the law had said, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation."¹ There is, of course, a sense in which the proverb was true. Heredity is a fact in human life, and heredity involves something of the principle. A dissolute parent affects his children, and no one can avoid the consequences that follow in a natural way. But that was not the way in which the people were applying it. They were applying the principle to the circumstances of the times, and saying that the body politic of Judah was suffering from the misdeeds of the past generation. Actually they were doing nothing of the kind; every

indication showed that the generation that witnessed the destruction of the state of Judah was worse than the generations of the past. Jeremiah had shown this in his sayings about the good and bad figs he saw during the reign of Jehoiakim.²

Ezekiel gave God's reply establishing the true principles of the case. In essence it was established in a single phrase: "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son are mine: the soul that sins shall die." Whatever effect heredity may have upon individual members of the race, the basic principle is that every man is responsible for his own actions.

It is interesting to notice the various aspects that are given by Ezekiel in establishing the principles he lays down. They are (a) religious duties, as they affect man in worship and reverence; (b) duties in connection with the relations between the sexes; and (c) duties and actions in the social affairs of life, including such things as kindness and compassion. Men are to live, or die, in accordance with their attitude toward and obedience or disobedience to their responsibilities under these three headings

(a) Religious duties. These are set out in a negative way in Ezekiel's summary; they imply conformity with the affirmative aspects though with a brief allusion to the affirmative principles: If a man does what is lawful and right—though this is not defined; if he does not eat upon the mountains, which, of course includes abstention from the high places that have been referred to, nor lift up his eyes to idols. Not doing either of these he will conform to the principles of the Law as expressed in the commandments given to Moses at the beginning of the nation's existence.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

(b) These are to some extent governed by the principles set out in the previous paragraph, but they go much farther, as set out in the ten commandments, extended by various enactments in other portions of the Mosaic law and the sayings of the prophets where they affect the relations between the sexes.

(c) In his social life a man must recognize his responsibility to others, doing something more than just what comes within the provisions of the ten commandments. He will avoid oppression; he will not take advantage of other's misfortunes; he will restore to the debtor his pledge, not as a mere technicality, but from kindly consideration. He gives food and clothing to those who need them. He refrains from robbery, whether the robbery be actual, or hidden behind some legal quibble; he refrains from exacting usury; and so forth. The social obligations are more comprehensive and far reaching in some respects than the others.

Conformity to these three-fold duties is the basis of well-doing; the man who conforms to them will surely live, and that notwithstanding he may be bearing some of the effects of the misdoings of a previous generation.

After enumerating these positive virtues, the Prophet goes on to speak of one who does not conform to these requirements. He does so under the figure of a son of a righteous man to indicate that the law of children reaping the results of their father's actions does not apply in matters of personal conduct. He sums up this case in the words "He shall not live . . . he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself".

Ezekiel does not leave the matter there. Repentance and reformation are provided for. If a wicked man turns away from his sins and afterwards keeps the commandments of God, "he shall surely live, he shall

not die". None of his previous transgressions will be remembered against him. He enforces the matter by a question on behalf of God. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" On the other hand if a righteous man turns to evil ways, his righteous ways of the past will not be considered. Conduct before God is not a debit and credit account where the balance is a deciding factor. A lifetime of good may be thrown away by forsaking ways of righteousness. On the other hand a life of disobedience may be overlooked if in the end a man forsakes it and seeks the way of righteousness. The matter may be summed up in a well-known saying, "It's the last lap that counts."

Ezekiel concluded, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God; so turn and live."

¹Exod. 20 : 5; ²Jer. 24.

A LAMENTATION

(Ezekiel, Chapter 19)

This section of the Prophet's writings is a lamentation for two of the last princes of Israel, and for Israel itself. When Josiah was killed at the battle of Megiddo, he was still a young man—under forty years of age; his sons were therefore very young to succeed to the throne of a kingdom in such precarious times. It is perhaps for that reason that the two who are mentioned in the lamentation are spoken of as whelps. The "Mother" is the kingdom of Judah. On the death of Josiah it is said "the people of the land"—that is the mother country—took Jehoahaz, and anointed him as king in place of his father. It was not the first time the people had taken the initiative in the matter of succession to the throne. They probably did so on this occasion as they considered him to be the best of his father's sons. He was twenty-three years old, and only reigned for three months, when the Pharaoh of Egypt, returning from Megiddo, deposed him and carried him to Egypt as a prisoner, setting Jehoiakim on the throne of Judah to reign there as a vassal king. That furnishes the background of the opening lines of the dirge:

What a lioness was your mother among lions !
She couched in the midst of young lions,
 rearing her whelps.
And she brought up one of her whelps;
 he became a young lion,
and he learned to catch the prey;
 he devoured men.

The nations sounded an alarm against him;
 he was taken in their pit;
 And they brought him with hooks
 to the land of Egypt.

There, for the time, the dirge leaves the history, for Jehoiakim, who succeeded Jehoahaz, was not appointed by the "lioness" but by Pharaoh of Egypt. After a reign of eleven years Jehoiakim was deposed by Nebuchadrezzar, though what happened to him is uncertain; the probability is that he committed suicide and so escaped being taken to Babylon. Then, once again, the people seem to have acted for themselves and appointed Jehoiachin, who was only eighteen years of age (the Chronicler says eight, but this is presumably an error that has crept in the text at some time). At this point the dirge is resumed:

When she saw that she was baffled,
 that her hope was lost,
 She took another of her whelps
 and made him a young lion.
 He prowled among the lions;
 he became a young lion
 And he learned to catch prey;
 he devoured men.
 And he ravaged their strongholds,
 and laid waste their cities;
 And the land was appalled and all who were in it
 at the sound of his roaring.
 Then the nations set against him
 snares on every side;
 They spread their net over him,
 he was taken in their pit;
 With hooks they put him in a cage
 and brought him to the king of Babylon;

they brought him into custody,
That his voice should no more be heard
upon the mountains of Israel.

The dirge seems somewhat idealistic as it does not really represent the historical record of the two young kings, whose reigns was short and inglorious. Yet there is no doubt they were intended to represent the two kings who have been named.

There appears to be some doubt whether the rest of the record is in the form of an elegy, though it is so shown in the R.S.V. It does not seem, however, to have the poetic character of a dirge. Consequently it is set out here as prose, while maintaining the wording of the Version. It leaves the story of the two unfortunate kings and deals with the people as a whole under the figure of a vineyard.

"Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard, transplanted by the water, fruitful and full of branches by reason of abundant water. Its strongest stem became a ruler's sceptre; it towered aloft among the thick boughs; it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches. But the vine was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground; the east wind dried it up; its fruit was stripped off, its strong stem withered, the fire consumed it. Now it is transplanted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And fire has gone out from its stem, has consumed its branches and fruit, so that there remains in it no strong stem; no sceptre for a ruler."

All that was left to Judah as a nation in the days when this lamentation was first spoken was a memory of the past. Israel as a whole had been a fruitful vine. In the days of David and Solomon the strongest stem had had a ruler's sceptre, and the nation had been raised up on high and could be seen in its height. Now it was

withered. Israel had been transplanted into a dry and thirsty land. Now there was no strong stem; no sceptre. All that was left was a weak subject state, ever getting weaker, fast approaching its dissolution. That dissolution could not be long delayed.

Ezekiel might well bring his lamentation to an end with the words "This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation".

19

"FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE"

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 20*)

Although this section pictures Judah in the nadir of its misfortunes, these words may be looked upon as the keynote of its message. It was spoken in the seventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity, and therefore only three or four years before the fall of Jerusalem. The elders of the people were still anxious to know what was likely to be the outcome of the events that were transpiring. There seems to have been something unreal in the enquiries as the word of the Lord came saying, "Is it to enquire of me that you have come? As I live I will not be enquired of by you". Then He spoke to Ezekiel; his words were, "Will *you* judge them, Son of man, will you judge them? Then let them know the abominations of their fathers". He then proceeded to enumerate something of the history of their fathers, a historical review in which their past was sketched in five periods.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

The first period was the time when their ancestors were in the land of Egypt. In that time the Lord had made Himself known to Israel, and had sworn that He would bring them out of Egypt and give them possession of the land of Canaan, "a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands." He had charged them to cast away their idols, "the detestable things their eyes fed on." They would not listen to Him, and did not cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, or the idols of Egypt. In such circumstances God might have left them in Egypt to continue in bondage, but, as He said, He acted for the sake of His name that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt.

To appreciate this saying fully it may be useful to recall an incident that occurred in the introduction of this first chapter of Israel's story. When Moses received his commission to undertake the work he was to do, he asked what name he was to use in telling the people that God had sent him; he did not want merely to say that he had been sent by God. In reply he was told that he was to say "I Am hath sent me": at least, that is how it is expressed in our Bibles. It has long been recognized that this is not a correct representation of the words God addressed to Moses. The alternative renderings are given as footnotes in the R.S.V.; they read "Or, I am what I am, or I will be what I will be," though it is better to substitute the personal pronoun "who" for "what". The marginal reading is generally accepted as the correct representation of the meaning intended to be conveyed. The context gives the following: "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", etc. Yahweh is derived from the same root

as *ehyeh*, the word translated “I will be”. God therefore had some well defined purpose in view, a purpose in which Israel was to play some part. It was because this was the case that Israel deserved the punishment she was receiving in the days to which Ezekiel referred. God’s purpose involved the redemption of Israel from Egypt and their establishment in the land that had been promised to their forefathers. Centuries earlier God had told Abraham that his descendants should be sojourners in a land that was not theirs, Egypt, but that they would be given the land of Canaan, from the River of Egypt to the great river (the Euphrates). Moreover He had made a covenant with Abraham to that effect.¹ Such a purpose required that Abraham’s descendants should be led out of Egypt into the wilderness as the first step towards the fulfilment of God’s purpose. Hence God wrought for His holy name’s sake.

The second period referred to in God’s sayings was the period of the Exodus. The circumstances attending that event should have made an indelible impression on the national memory. They saw what happened, the disasters that overwhelmed the Egyptians as plague after plague came on them until the spirit of the people and of their ruler was broken. They heard the cry of the Egyptians when all the firstborn in the country perished, and Israel marched out. Some weeks later they heard the voice of God proclaiming the commandments that were to guide their conduct. Yet in the wilderness they rebelled against Him. Again God wrought for His own name’s sake.

The third period was the time in which they remained in the wilderness, where they manifested the same characteristics. In the words of Ezekiel, God exhorted them there, “Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers,

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols". Yet it had to be said, "But the children rebelled against me, they did not walk in my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances." Once again God said, "I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out."

Still speaking of the wilderness journey Ezekiel referred to the warnings given to the people during that time. He had given them "statutes that were not good", not because they were not good in themselves, but because they would be unto death.

This led Ezekiel to the fourth period, that of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. His words were, "Thus saith the Lord God, in this again your fathers blasphemed me by dealing treacherously with me. For when I had brought them into the land which I swore to give them then, whenever they saw any high hill or any lofty tree, there they offered their sacrifices and presented the provocation of their offerings, there they sent up their soothing odours, and there they poured out their drink offerings". In other words they copied the ways of the earlier inhabitants of the land, worshipping idols of wood and stone.

Then Ezekiel passed to the fifth period, his own times; he did so very briefly. Israel had followed in the ways of their fathers, going astray after the same detestable things. So God asked the question, "Shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you."

It might seem that everything had failed, and that the purpose expressed in the name of Yahweh would never be realised. In the circumstances the Prophet

introduced what may be described as the long view. God is never in a hurry; with Him time does not count; His is an eternal now. Hence His saying, “As I live, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I enter into judgment with you face to face . . . I will make you pass under the rod, and I will let you go in by number. I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

With the rebels purged out a new picture is presented. On the mountain of God, the “mountain height of Israel, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land; there I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing odour I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations, and you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country which I swore to give to your fathers”. Then they will know that God is their Lord.

The long view is the only way in which such statements can be understood. Such words cannot be applied to the times of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The people are to loathe themselves for all the evils they have committed. As in the case of the riddle of the two eagles and the cedar tree in its last phase, a Messianic

interpretation is essential although it may be presumed the exiles in Babylon looked for an earlier fulfilment. The long view has to find a place for the people passing through the "wilderness of the peoples," and "under the rod" that the rebels may be purged from among them. By this process the sheep will be brought within the bonds of the covenant, and will be fitted for the purpose for which they are regathered. The "rod" is the shepherd's staff which was used to count the sheep as they entered the fold at the close of the day. So the LXX renders the passage "I will cause them to go in by number," counting them to see that all is correct. With the rebels purged out, and the numbered flock prepared for the future, God says of them, "As a pleasing odour I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am the Lord."

It will be seen later how God's holiness is shown when Ezekiel's pictures of the future find their consummation in the Sanctuary which he describes in the closing portion of his book.

¹Gen. 15.

“A RUIN, A RUIN—UNTIL HE COMES”

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 21*)

The prophecy contained in this chapter is almost self-explanatory. The few verses that are included at the end of chapter 20 (verses 45—49) may be considered with it; indeed they may be regarded as an introduction to the chapter as a whole.

From his place among the captives in Babylon Ezekiel was told to prophesy against the forest of the field. Although he describes it as the “forest of the Negeb,” it obviously refers to the land of Judah as a whole. He was to call to the “forest of the Negeb” to hear the word of the Lord, announcing that He would kindle a fire that would devour every green tree and every dry tree, with a blazing fire. Those addressed constituted the bulk of the nation, that portion still living in the land of Judah. Ezekiel’s words were that “all faces from south to north shall be scorched by the fire, all flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched”. The words were plain enough and their implication clear, yet the peoples’ comment was “Is he not a maker of allegories?” In order that there should be no misunderstanding what the allegory meant Ezekiel went on to speak as recorded in the chapter that follows.

The simile of green and dry trees is not again referred to: indeed the words were scarcely figurative at all. His opening phrases were speaking in the name of the Lord: “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries, prophecy against the land of Israel, and say to the land of Israel, Thus

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

says the Lord: Behold, I am against you, and will draw forth my sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked." The sword was to run from south to north. The "sword" was used in its widest sense; it implied all forms of judgment that might be used in effecting the judgments that were to follow. In the past the Assyrian had been God's battleaxe to effect God's purposes on northern Israel.

To impress the people of Judah with the character of the coming Babylonian invasion Ezekiel was told to "sigh with breaking heart and bitter grief," so that the people would be moved to ask him why he did so. In reply he was to say, "Because of the tidings. When it comes, every heart will melt, and all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it will be fulfilled."

There followed some words from God which may be termed the Song of the Sword. They were—

A sword, a sword is sharpened and also polished,
Sharpened for slaughter, polished to flash like
lightning.

To the couplet further words were to be added. "Do we now make mirth? You have despised the rod, my son, with everthing of wood. The sword is given to be polished, that it may be handled; it is sharpened and polished to be given into the hand of the slayer." It was to be given into the hand of those who would use it against the people and princes of Israel. Ezekiel was to smite upon his thigh; a test was coming! And he was to prophesy. The words that were addressed to him abounded with allusions to the sword. "Let the sword come down twice, yea thrice, the sword for those to be slain, the sword for the great slaughter, the glittering sword polished for slaughter!"

Still the people seem to have been sceptical, although the Babylonian armies were on the move. They were not necessarily going against Judah! Ezekiel was therefore told to draw a kind of diagram showing two ways, which branched out from a point from which Rabbah of Ammon and Jerusalem might be reached. There the king of Babylon halted; he himself was not certain which of the roads he should follow. From certain events that happened later it is possible that Judah and Ammon, and probably other peoples, were conspiring against Babylon, hence Nebuchadrezzar's hesitancy. In these circumstances he decided to use divination. He shook arrows to see in which way they pointed, he consulted teraphim, he looked in the liver of a slain animal for guidance. He drew the lot; it pointed to the right hand—the way to Jerusalem. His route was decided; Jerusalem was to be attacked first. The decision was in accordance with his own inclination; he called to mind the provocation he had received, the broken oath of fealty. In the words of the prophet, "Before you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered so that in all your doings your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance you shall be taken in them."

Having come to a decision Nebuchadrezzar ordered his army to take the road leading to Jerusalem. It was in accord with the purpose to punish Judah and its king, as Ezekiel apostrophized: "And you, O unhallowed wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, thus says the Lord God: Remove the turban, and take off the crown; things shall not remain as they are; exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high. A ruin, ruin, ruin, I will make it; there shall not be even a trace of it until he comes whose right it is; and to him will I give it." It meant the

end of the kingdom, an end with the promise of restoration at some undefined time. In later chapters more will be heard of that restoration.*

*NOTE: The judgment of Ammon that follows this section of Ezekiel's writings was, no doubt, placed there because of its connection with the incidents that led Nebuchadrezzar to besiege Jerusalem. As all other predictions concerning peoples other than Israel are gathered together, and include other sayings concerning Ammon, it is thought desirable to postpone consideration of the verses until the prophecies concerning the foreign peoples are under review. They will be found on page 108.

21

THE JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM

(Ezekiel, Chapter 22)

As the days approached that were to see the end of the city until the time of its restoration and the return of its people from their captivity in Babylon, Ezekiel's consciousness of the sins of its people, and his pictures of their evil ways, become more and more definite. The section now to be considered contains a catalogue of the sins of the people. It is sad reading. A city in which the temple of the Lord had been standing for hundreds of years, and which had so often experienced the results of flagrant disobedience, must have fallen very low to call forth the Prophet's denunciations. The end, however, was at hand, and Ezekiel was to tell its people of their abominations.

To give a list of these abominations would be of little use, but a classification of them and a brief sum-

THE JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM

mary may be of value, if only as a warning. They may be divided into three classes—matters connected with worship, departure from the moral laws that had been given to their fathers, and the failure of those who should have resisted the tendency of the people in these matters. These failures resulted in the destruction of the nation and the captivity of the people. They may be summed up as idolatry, shedding of blood, despising parents, oppressing strangers, the fatherless and widows, despising holy things, profaning the Sabbath, and so forth. Sexual sins were rife, there was bribery and corruption, and the practice of usury.

The summary of these things led to the question, "Can your courage endure, or can your hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with you?" The result was that the people would be scattered among the nations that their evil ways might be cured, not by other peoples but by the realization that the evils had come upon them because of their ways.

The results that were to follow are pictured in impressive words. "Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me." All of them, silver and bronze and tin and lead had become dross, and Jerusalem was to be the furnace in which the metals were to be gathered together and melted. It was not that the melting was part of a refining process; the fire was to be for punishment, not for purification; it was to be a fire of wrath. The usual object to be served by a refiner's fire is to cleanse; Judah had gone too far for that; only judgment could remain to be accomplished.

As the section comes to an end there is a repetition of some of the charges made against the people of Jerusalem and Judea. All sections of the population had been included in the evils of the time. Priests who should

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

have guided the people had done violence to the law and profaned the holy things of God. The princes had been like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood and destroying lives to add to their dishonest gain. The prophets, instead of protesting against such practices, had daubed over the evils, using whitewash to cover them instead of denouncing the evil ways of princes and priests, making things look right and clean when really the defilements were merely hidden. The people had practised extortion and committed robbery, oppressing the poor and needy. None could be found to "build the wall and stand in the breach" and thus save the nation from the fate that threatened it.

22

AHOLAH AND AHOLIBAH

(Ezekiel, Chapter 23)

As the last days of the city approached the words of the Prophet became more precise. In the parable of Aholah and Aholibah the moral and religious condition of Israel and Judah are described searchingly. Israel was already in captivity in Assyria. There is a significance in the names given to the two representative women. Aholah, Samaria, signifies "His, (or her) tent is in her"; Aholibah (Jerusalem and Judah) "My tent is in her". The latter name was particularly appropriate for a city in which the temple had been built, the sanctuary, the

city of which a Psalmist had said, speaking in the name of God, "The Lord has chosen Zion: he desired it for his habitation: This is my resting place for ever, here I will dwell, for I have desired it."¹

Ezekiel described the lives of the two women, dealing first with the time when both dwelt in Egypt, where they played the harlot in their youth. Little is known about their lives in that country, but various references make it clear that they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers. It is not surprising that they should have been for they were surrounded by the emblems of idolatry. Egypt was essentially a land of false worships; its gods were innumerable, and their representations must have been seen everywhere. They ranged too, from the highest form, that of Amen-Ra, to the lowest; even the scarab beetle having a religious association.

From their life in Egypt Ezekiel proceeded to the time when they occupied the land of Canaan. There he commenced with Aholah—Samaria. He does not refer to the earliest failure. The beginning of the independent existence of Samaria was associated with Jeroboam of whom it is frequently recorded that he "made Israel to sin", setting up calves in Bethel and as rivals to the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem. Under later kings Samaria or Israel went much further, worshipping Baal and engaging in other false cults.

Ezekiel charges Aholah with playing the harlot, doting on the Assyrians, defiling herself with them. As a result she was delivered over to them, and ultimately was despoiled by them. The kings who reigned over the country sought the help of Assyrian monarchs in their endeavours to secure their positions. They thus brought upon themselves the doom described by Ezekiel. They

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

“uncovered her nakedness, siezed her sons and daughters, slew her with the sword, so that she became a byword among women.” That is as far as her story as a nation goes.

At this point Ezekiel turned to her sister-nation, Aholibah, Judah, with which he was more directly concerned. He described her as more corrupt than Aholah. She too, doted on the Assyrians. When, for example, Ahaz of Judah was threatened by a combination of Syria and Israel, he sought the help of Tiglath-pileser III, and refused to put his trust in the God of his fathers. Later, his son, Hezekiah, received the representatives of Merodach-Baladan of Chaldea, both being opposed to Assyria at the time.² Later, in the times immediately preceding those of Ezekiel, Judah (Aholibah) constantly looked to Egypt for help instead of the Lord her God, with disastrous results. Now she was reaping the fruits. She had brought it upon herself by the course she had chosen. Now Babylonians and their helpers would be brought against her to inflict the punishment decreed by God in the following words: “You shall drink your sister’s cup, which is deep and large; you shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. A cup of horror and desolation is the cup of your sister Samaria; you shall drink it and drain it out, and pluck off your hair, and tear your breasts.”

A new prophecy starts later; it deals with both peoples. It commences with a question to the Prophet. Will you judge Aholah and Aholibah? Then declare to them their abominable deeds. The list that follows is a recapitulation of charges connected with false worship under metaphors of adultery, slaughtering their children in sacrifice to idols, inviting men from afar and joining

with them in their worship, attracting them by their actions. The end would be that the very people that had been attracted in this way would join in effecting the judgments that were at hand, judgments that would involve death and destruction. There was, however, to be something remedial in this, for Aholah and Aholibah would be taught that Jehovah was their God.

¹Psalm 132 : 13 and 14.

²2 Kings 20 : 12-19.

23

THE END OF THE KINGDOM

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 24*)

A symbol and a symbolic incident in the Prophet's life are joined in this section to illustrate the siege and fall of the city of Jerusalem. Together they mark the end of the first part of his predictions. From this point they take on entirely different characteristics.

The two may be considered together. It is worthy of note that the event which one represented and the other portended is, apparently considered so important, that the date is specifically mentioned three times in the Old Testament, and is implied in a fourth reference. In the historical section it is found in the book of Kings, where it is said, "In the ninth year of his (Zedekiah's) reign, in the tenth month, and on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it"¹.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Jeremiah gives the same information in his closing chapter.² Ezekiel repeats it, substituting the year of Jehoiachin's captivity for Zedekiah's reign,³ while a later prophet, Zechariah, refers to the month in a question put to him about a fast which was held later to commemorate it.⁴ A date so frequently recorded must have been deeply impressed on the mind of the nation as a whole.

On the day named the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel in Babylon: "Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day, the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day". The repetition of the words "This very day" is significant. Ezekiel was hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem and could have known nothing of what was taking place there; yet he recorded the date, the one specified by the historian of the nation and by Jeremiah in Jerusalem! He was told to utter an allegory to the exiles in Babylon, many of whom were hoping to return soon to their native country. The allegory was expressed in the following words:

"Set the pot, set it on, pour in water also;
Put in it the pieces of flesh, all the good pieces,
the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones.
Take the choicest one of the flock, pile the logs under
it;
Seethe also the bones in it."

The pot, a cauldron, was rusty, and the picture of the contents represents the condition of those who were within the besieged city. That position is described in the words that follow. "Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose rust is in it, and whose rust has not gone out of it. Take out piece after piece, without making any choice." The words were intended to describe the

character of the people of Jerusalem; apart from a few who sympathized with Jeremiah, they were like the contents of the cauldron; all were to endure the effects of the siege.

As Ezekiel proceeded, the intensity of the sufferings to be experienced were expressed in the language used. "Woe to the bloody city! I will make the pile great. Heap on the logs, kindle the fire, boil well the flesh, empty out the broth and let the bones be burned up. Then set it empty upon the coals that it may become hot, and its copper may burn, that its filthiness may be melted in it, its rust consumed." The rust represented the "filthy lewdness" of the city's population, which had gone too far to be pardoned.

After the figure of the rusty cauldron enduring the fire until the whole thing and its contents were burned and spoiled, a new figure of the destruction of the city was introduced. It was put in the form of an illustration that affected the Prophet himself. It came first in the form of an intimation of what was to happen. "Son of man, behold I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down." Ezekiel's restraint from weeping was to indicate the attitude of the people of Jerusalem at the fall of the city; he was to sigh but exhibit no other sign of mourning. Then he simply records that he spoke to the people in the morning and that at evening his wife died.

Ezekiel's restraint from showing any of the usual signs of mourning raised the curiosity of the exiles. Why did he not act as others would have done? His answer was "The word of the Lord came to me; Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, Behold I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

delight of your eyes, and the desire of your souls . . . And you shall do as I have done; you shall pine away in your iniquities and groan to one another."

When the news of the fall of Jerusalem reached the exiles they would realize that Ezekiel had spoken for God. There was to be a sign to the exiles when the event took place. Ezekiel's mouth would be opened; he would no longer be dumb. There would be one other result, the exiles would know that God was indeed the Lord.

Here the first division of the prophecies of Ezekiel ends, ends on a note of expectancy. They would know that he had been a true prophet. They would realize also that when he spoke of restoration and redemption he was still a prophet whose words could be trusted.

¹2 Kings 25 : 1; ²Jer. 52 : 4; ³Ezek. 24 : 1; ⁴Zech. 8 : 19.

PART II

I

SOME INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

It is significant that in each of the collections of the three great prophets' writings, their predictions concerning the nations outside Israel are gathered together in a section by themselves, and that they are preceded and followed by prophecies concerning Israel. In the writings of Isaiah they are found in chapters 13—27; in Jeremiah they are included in chapters 46—51. Now in Ezekiel they are found in chapters 23—32. In this peculiarity an important principle is illustrated. The position of Israel among the peoples of the world is unique. Jehovah is the God of Israel; He made Himself known by His name Yahweh at the commencement of Israel's history as a nation.

There is something significant in this; it emphasizes Israel's place in the purpose of God. From the time when He made the promise to Abraham that at a fixed time Israel would embark on its career as a nation, until its fall as predicted in the writings of Ezekiel, allusions to other nations and peoples are few, except when they were brought into contact with Israel. The whole story told in the Old Testament circles around Israel. The call of Israel to be the people of God requires the prominence of the nation. As Jeremiah said of them speaking for God, "I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end."¹ In Isaiah it was foretold that in the days of Israel's glory the Gentiles would come to her light and kings to the brightness of her rising; so Ezekiel, after

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

uttering prophecies concerning some of the Gentile nations of the time, finishes his collection of prophecies with pictures of the future glories of Israel, and the construction of a house of prayer which is to be for all the peoples of the earth.

It is now necessary to consider the predictions Ezekiel made concerning the Gentile nations with whom the nation came in contact.

¹Jer. 30 : 11.

2

PROPHECIES CONCERNING AMMON

(*Ezekiel 21 : 28-32 and 25 : 1-7*)

The Ammonites, whose territory was situated east of the Jordan, were descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. They were therefore somewhat related to Israel, with whom they were at war from time to time.

It will be recalled that a prophecy concerning the Ammonites was recorded after the account of Nebuchadrezzar's advance against Jerusalem. On that occasion he was, at first, uncertain whether Judah or Ammon should be the first to be dealt with. Something was said about them in connection with that campaign, but consideration of the matter was left over until other Gentile peoples were referred to by Ezekiel.

From the history of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem it seemed as if the Ammonites hoped to gain some advantage for themselves.¹ The inner history of

PROPHECIES CONCERNING AMMON

the matter is not clear, and much has to be left to surmise. Baalis, the king of Ammon, seems to have been opposed to the Babylonian nominee as governor in the remnant of Judah.

The prophecy commences with the words, "Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach." Presumably the "reproach" was directed against Judah, and the sword was drawn to secure some advantage for Ammon consequent on the overthrow of Judah. The words spoken by Ezekiel continued: "Say a sword, a sword is drawn for the slaughter, it is polished to glitter, and to flash like lightning—while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you—to be laid on the necks of the unhallowed wicked, whose time has come, the time of their final punishment." While the words are not clear, in view of our lack of knowledge of the facts of the case, it seems as if the Ammonites had drawn the sword to secure some advantage for themselves from the fall of Jerusalem. The expression "Whose day has come, the time of their final punishment," is almost a verbatim reproduction of the words addressed to the unhallowed wicked one, prince of Israel, in the prophecy against Zedekiah.²

Whatever may have been the hopes of the Ammonites, they were to reap punishment, and not to gain advantage from the advance of the Babylonians against Jerusalem. They would be delivered into the hands of brutal men skilful to destroy.

The second prophecy concerning the Ammonites arose out of their attitude to Judah in the days of its fall. They rejoiced over the destruction of the Sanctuary, and over the desolation of the land, and the captivity of the people of Judah. For this they were to be handed over to the "people of the East", who would dwell in

the midst of them, and eat the produce of their land. The men of the East were the nomad tribes of the Arabian desert, men whose hands were against all men, living on plunder and dwelling in tents which they would pitch within the territory of the Ammonites. Finally the Ammonites were to be cut off from among the peoples and be completely destroyed.

¹Jer. 40 : 14; 41 : 10-15. ²See page 97.

3

THE JUDGMENT OF MOAB

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 25 : 8-11*)

Moab, like Ammon, was descended from Lot, and its territory was east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. The country was more settled than that of Ammon. In the past it had paid an annual tribute to Israel, but in the days of Ezekiel that had been discontinued. When Ezekiel wrote both Ammon and Moab had conducted raids on Judah.

When Ezekiel spoke, Moab was rejoicing at the low condition of Judah. It had fallen from its position of superiority over other nations in its immediate vicinity. The primacy it had once held was a thing of the past, it was open to attack as much as they were. Ezekiel therefore said that Moab would be as vulnerable as Judah; her chief cities, the glory of the country, would be opened to the children of the East as a posses-

THE JUDGMENT OF MOAB

sion. The prophecy is a short one; its culmination would be the disappearance of Moab from among the nations. Then they would know that the Lord was God.

Very little is known about the later history of Moab. There is no evidence to show that it existed as a state after the exile of Judah. "The comparative silence of post-exilic literature as to Moab suggests an early date for its disappearance; even in Nehemiah the Arabians have taken the place of Moab as the allies of Ammon. Possibly Moab in its pride unduly taxed the patience of Nebuchadrezzar and was overthrown, and the bulk of its population deported; then the Arabs may have occupied Moab and absorbed the remnant of the people."¹

¹*Hastings' Bible Dictionary*; art. "Moab, Moabites".

4

THE JUDGMENT OF EDM

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 25 : 12-14*)

Edom was more closely connected with Judah than were Ammon and Moab; Esau was the twin brother of Jacob. It outlived Ammon and Moab, for it continued until New Testament times, for the Herodian family were descendants of Edom, although John Hyrcanus, one of the kings of Judah after the Maccabean revolt, conquered Edom and incorporated the country into Judah.

The prophecy concerning them commences with the words "Thus says the Lord God, Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance upon them." In doing this Edom brought this prophecy upon themselves. There had been bitter feelings between the peoples of Judah and Edom. The Edomites had been conquered by David, as he expressed it in a Psalm which makes it clear that the conflict was a bitter one.

Who will bring me the fortified city ?

Who will lead me to Edom ?

Hast Thou not rejected us, O God ?

Thou dost not go forth, O God, with our armies.

O grant us help against the foe,

For vain is the help of man !

With God we shall do valiantly ;

It is He who will tread down our foes¹

When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem the Edomites rejoiced and urged them on, crying "Rase it, rase it, down to its foundations."² They stood at a parting of the ways cutting off the fugitives of Judah and delivering them up to the enemy.³ Actions such as these indicate the bitter feelings they had toward Judah. Such a spirit called forth the words that follow. "Thus saith the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom, and cut off from it man and beast; I will make it desolate, from Teman to Dedan they shall fall by the sword." The vengeance was to come upon Edom by the hand of Israel. The saying is one of the few statements involving the restoration of Judah before Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration recorded in the later portion of his book.

¹Psalm 60 : 9-12; ²Psalm 137 : 7; ³Obadiah, verses 13 and 14.

JUDGMENTS ON THE PHILISTINES

(Ezekiel 25 : 15-17)

The Philistines were enemies of Israel and Judah from very early times. Unlike Ammon, Moab, and Edom they were not members of the Semitic race. Although they are mentioned in patriarchal times, their known history begins somewhere about the twelfth century B.C. when a number of tribes left their homes in the lands and isles of Greece and sought to invade Egypt. Rameses III repulsed their approach and some of them took possession of the south-western coastland of Israel, though there is reason to conclude that some members of the race were there earlier. From the time of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua they frequently appear in the history of Israel, usually as foes. In the early times of the monarchy under Saul and David there were frequent wars between them and Israel. Hence the statement in the writings of Ezekiel under review: "Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of heart to destroy in never-ending enmity." The Philistines practically disappear from the Bible record after the destruction of Jerusalem, nor is there any definite knowledge of them as a nation in the secular history of the times. In the circumstances the words of Ezekiel may be regarded as ending their history, except for an allusion to them in the book of the prophet Zechariah. Ezekiel's words are "Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the rest of the seacoast. I will execute great

vengeance upon them with wrathful chastisements. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

6

THE FALL OF TYRE

(Ezekiel, Chapter 26)

After the brief prophecies about the small nations that were round about Judah when she fell before the Babylonians, the sayings about Tyre are of great length, occupying no less than three chapters, except for a few verses which concern Zidon. The contrast is remarkable, even when the difference between the peoples already dealt with and the people of Tyre are remembered. Ezekiel seemed to recognize the importance of what he was about to say as he notes the day when the words he records come to him. It was the eleventh year, the first day of the month of Jehoiachin's captivity, though the month is not given. The wording that follows assumes that the fall of Jerusalem had taken place, and as that had happened on the ninth day of the fourth month of that year, the revelation must have been given on that day or one that followed it.

Tyre occupied an important position in the world of Ezekiel's days and exercised considerable influence in the world. Although younger than its sister city, Zidon, it had completely outstripped her in importance. Back in the days of Joshua it was described as "the fortified city of Tyre", or, "the strong city." Usually it was on friendly terms with Israel. In the early days of

the Israelitish monarchy it was on excellent terms with David and Solomon; indeed it is said that Hiram of Tyre was a lover of the former¹. Tyre profited considerably from its association with Israel from the mercantile transactions that took place between them.

On the moral and religious side its influence was baneful, particularly in the days of Ahab, the king of the northern tribes. Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre. This Tyrian was not only the king, he was also the high priest of Ashtoreth, whose worship was accompanied with immoral rites. The goddess was regarded as the consort of Baal.

Tyre was essentially a sea power: its commercial activities spread to the various ports of the Mediterranean. Its galleys found their way westward, reaching even beyond the Straits of Gibraltar and the western coast of Europe as far as the British Isles. Whether its trading activities had taken its mariners as far as Britain in the days of Ezekiel is not known. Her sailors and merchants travelled far, and established trading centres at various points along the Mediterranean Sea.

In the days of Ezekiel Tyre was one of the nations who participated in the conspiracy of Syrian nations against the rising power of Babylon. Zedekiah of Judah², urged on by his irresponsible advisers, seems to have been a leading member of the conspiracy. When it failed owing to the action of Babylon, and the fall of Jerusalem opened the way for the Babylonians to act freely, the Tyrians saw an opportunity to further their own interests. Their comment was "Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken, it has swung open to me; I shall be replenished now that she is laid waste." Judah was the gate through which much of Tyre's merchandise passed to reach lands beyond. Now, by the fall of Jerusalem the

door was open! Hence the rejoicing of her merchants. After the long standing association between Tyre and Judah it was a callous, if understandable conclusion, and it brought forth the rebuke, "Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you as the sea brings up its waves." The walls of Tyre were to be destroyed and the place made as one on which fishermen would spread their nets. In such circumstances the mainland of Tyre would be destroyed.

This result was to be effected by Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, who would set up engines of war to break down the towers of the city. The attack is described in graphic terms. "He will direct the shock of his battering rams against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. His horses will be so many that their dust will cover you; your wall will shake at the noise of the horsemen and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as one enters a city which has been breached." Although the siege of Tyre lasted a long time, and the city fell, Nebuchadrezzar gained little from his persistence. Sixteen years later Ezekiel wrote, "Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, made his army labour hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare; yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labour that he had performed against it." It was a case of a conflict between the elephant and the whale. Babylon was a land power; Tyre was a sea power. The sea was always open to the Tyrians, who had friends all along the Mediterranean seaboard. The land power of Babylon was powerless; it could not prevent the resurrection of Tyre when once the Babylonian forces moved away.

Yet at the time Tyre suffered greatly. Her losses in manpower must have been heavy. No quarter seems

to have been given; indeed, after a siege lasting some years it was not likely to have been. But Tyre had a reserve. Half a mile away from the mainland city there was an island, a second Tyre as it were, and so long as a prospective enemy was deficient in maritime equipment, Tyre could not be completely subdued. Yet Nebuchadrezzar's success was a grievous blow to Tyre and to her colonies and places of merchandise. Ezekiel wrote a lamentation which he put in the mouth of the colonies and trading centres. It was as follows:—

How you have vanished from the seas,

O city renowned,

That was mighty on the sea,

You and your inhabitants,

Who imposed your terror on all the mainlands.

Now the isles tremble on the day of your fall.

Yea, the isles that are in the sea

Are dismayed at your passing.

Those who took part in this dirge are referred to as the princes of the sea who will step down from their thrones, remove their robes, strip off their embroidered garments. Instead of these they will clothe themselves with trembling, appalled over the fall of the city and what has happened to it. The whole constitution of the city would be brought to an end. It was not that the end would come when the destruction of Tyre by the Babylonian forces took possession of it. The prophecy has to be taken on the long view, like many other predictions contained in the writings of the prophets.

¹1 Kings 5 : 1; ²Jer. 25 : 22 and 27 : 1-11.

A LAMENTATION OVER TYRE

(Ezekiel, Chapter 27)

The fall of Tyre, with its reverberations in the western world, and to a lesser extent the world generally, was a great shock to those who were concerned in her mercantile activities. In this section Tyre is pictured under the figure of one of her great trading ships which traversed the Mediterranean carrying her merchandise to the various colonies and trading establishments along the shores and islands, though almost all the known world of the time is included in the detailed particulars that follow. The lament may be divided into two parts, 1—A description of the city itself under the figure of a ship, and 2—A detailed list of the countries and areas that were engaged in trading activities with her.

1.—First there is the description of the ship that represented Tyre itself. It is introduced as a lamentation, "Say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrance to the sea, merchant of the peoples on many coastlands, thus says the Lord God,

O Tyre, you have said, "I am of perfect beauty"

Your borders are in the heart of the seas;

Your builders made perfect your beauty.

They made all your planks of fir trees from Senir;

They took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.

Of oaks from Bashan they made your oars;

They made your deck of pines from the coasts of Cyprus

Inlaid with ivory.

Of fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail,
Serving as your ensign.

Blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah was your
awning.

From the ships Ezekiel passed to the ships' companies; the rowers were from Sidon and Arvad, their pilots from Zemer; the skilled men of Gebal caulked the seams, while all the ships of the sea with their mariners, bartered the wares of the Tyrians. All the places named were situated between places comparatively adjacent to Tyre in the north, and reached Egypt in the south. When it came to men of war, Persia, Lud and Put were within the area from which they were obtained. Tyre was eager to obtain military help from any quarter from which mercenaries might be found.

2.—From the ships and their crews and the fighting men who served Tyre, Ezekiel turned to merchandise on which it thrived. In connection with this much of the then known world was included. The list starts with Tarshish, a name usually assumed to apply to Tartessus, the coast of Spain just beyond the straits of Gibraltar as viewed from Tyre. How much further Tyrian ships sailed on their mercantile activities is not very certain, though it is recognised that they reached the British Isles. The prevalence of the name "Tor" for heights in Devon and Derbyshire may be a witness to such an association.

Between Tarshish and other places many are mentioned by their ancient names. They include Mediterranean islands, such as Cyprus ("Kittim") and Rhodes, while the land regions include districts around the Black Sea, Greece, Asia Minor, Arabia, Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and adjacent lands. The merchandise associated with these lands was about as diversified

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

as may be imagined. It included precious metals, gems, foodstuffs, clothing, carpets, ivory tusks, and ebony, choice wines and spices. A quiet perusal of the chapter now under notice will show the extent and the variety of the merchandise of the great city.

Now, for a time at all events, it had come to an end, and, once again Ezekiel broke into poetry as he contemplated the great change:

So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of
the seas,

Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas.
The east wind has wrecked you in the heart of the
seas.

Your riches, your wares, your merchandise,

Your mariners and pilots,

Your caulkers, your dealers in merchandise

And all your men of war who are in you,

With all your company that is in your midst,

Sink into the heart of the seas

On the day of your ruin.

The Prophet goes on to speak of the countryside shaking, the mariners wailing, casting dust on their heads, wallowing in ashes, girding themselves in sackcloth, and weeping in bitterness of soul. It looked like a complete end to Tyre's activities. Yet it was not, for Tyre revived, though only to fall again when Alexander the Great did what Nebuchadrezzar failed to do, finding a way to secure the fall of island Tyre.

A DIRGE ON THE PRINCE OF TYRE

(Ezekiel, Chapter 28 : 1-19)

The fall of Tyre is followed by a remarkable description of the fall of its Prince. It seems probable that Ezekiel was not referring to a particular person, but rather describing a personification of the kings of the mercantile city. The great success that had attended the Tyrian people had resulted in those who held the supreme position in its counsels coming to regard themselves as more than human. The people of Tyre worshipped Baal (Moloch—"horrid Moloch, smeared with blood") and Ashtoreth, but, as a writer on the history of Phoenicia points out, these merely enjoyed "a supremacy, or at any rate, a pre-eminence over all other personages of the Phoenician Pantheon."¹ There was, therefore, no impediment to the reigning king of Tyre being regarded as a god.

Ezekiel, however, as a prophet of Jehovah, saw in him simply a human being. Now the basis on which the king regarded himself as divine had collapsed, there was nothing to distinguish him from any other human being. Hence the opening words, "Thus says the Lord God: Because your heart is proud, and you have said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas, yet you are but a man, and no god, though you consider yourself as wise as a god." Of course the prince of Tyre in using such an expression did not attach the same meaning to his words as the Prophet did. To Ezekiel there was but one God, whether he used the name of Yahweh (Jehovah), Adonai, or Elohim. The king of

Tyre, on the other hand, would have experienced no difficulty in believing in "gods many and lords many". This difference of outlook must be allowed for in understanding what the expression meant to Ezekiel and the Prince of Tyre respectively. The latter had exercised despotic power and regarded himself as supreme. Ezekiel therefore retorts, "You are but a man . . . By your wisdom and understanding you have gotten wealth for yourself and have gathered gold and silver, and your heart has become proud in your wealth—therefore!" Then follows a description of the calamity that had come, or was coming, that would bring this "god" to die the death of the slain. Then the prophet asks the question, "Will you say 'I am a god' in the presence of those who slay you?" By the experiences through which he would go, the self-styled god would have to confess that he was only a man. All his accumulated treasures would be of no avail in the hour of his fall.

At this point Ezekiel gives expression to a lamentation over the fallen "god" of Tyre; the words he used were the words of God. Some of the language used in the dirge is not easily apprehended. It must be borne in mind that the language is not to be understood literally; there is a taunt in the dirge; some of the sayings were in the nature of sarcasm. Much of what follows represents the king's representation of himself, indeed that seems to be the basis of much that follows. This needs to be borne in mind when the various sayings are considered. It should also be noted that according to the R.S.V. some of the Hebrew expressions are either obscure or uncertain, and this must be allowed for in applying them.

The first expression is "You were the signet of

perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." Despotic power as king of Tyre had led him to this valuation of himself. Then he had been in Eden. Geographically the saying was correct. Eden was a term of wide significance, and it was one of the places that had participated in the merchandise of Tyre. In the success that had attended her mercantile efforts precious stones of every description had flowed into the city and were available to deck the king in his glory, particularly on the day he was created, that is, crowned. At that time he had been placed with a guardian cherub on the holy mountain of God. A guardian cherub was obviously given for protective purposes. The long history of Tyre amid the dangers associated with the rise of the great monarchies of the past, the Babylon of Hammurabi, Assyria, the revived Babylon, needed protection, and that had been given to the king of Tyre until the time of its fall. Tyre had been faithful to its alliance with the house of David "till iniquity was found in her". Now, in the time of her greatest sufferings, Tyre, like others, had been ready to forsake the fortunes of Judah, and to rejoice in her downfall.

Then, seeing the possibilities of increasing trade activities she sinned, and God cast her out as a profane thing from the "mountain of God", and the guardian cherub drove Tyre from the midst of the stones of fire.

The root cause of the fall of the king of Tyre was pride and his assumption of worldly beauty and wisdom. Therefore he was cast down and exposed to his enemies by the multitude of iniquities, the unrighteousness of his trade and the profanity of his sanctuaries. His fall was such that it appalled all who knew him.

¹RAWLINSON, *Phoenicia*, page 32.

JUDGMENT OF ZIDON

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 28 : 20-26*)

Although Zidon was established before Tyre it never attained the eminence of the younger city. Zidon was the firstborn of Canaan, the son of Ham, so that Zidon must have been one of the earliest cities in the world. It was situated some twenty miles north of Tyre on the sea coast. For some reason it had been a "briar to prick, or a thorn to hurt", the house of Israel.

There had evidently been actions adverse to Israel at some time, for Ezekiel, speaking in the name of God, says, "I am against you, and I will manifest my glory in the midst of you." Very little is known of the history of the city. In the circumstances all that need be said is to note the difference between the sayings concerning Tyre and those relating to Zidon. Tyre was to disappear, whereas Zidon was to remain.

Ezekiel's allusions end with a contrast between the future of Zidon and that of Israel. The latter is expressed in the last verses of the chapter. "When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and manifest my holiness in them . . . then shall they dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbours who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God."

PROPHECY CONCERNING EGYPT

(Ezekiel, chapters 29-32)

The prophecies concerning Egypt that bring Ezekiel's prophecies concerning nations outside Israel to an end occupy four chapters, and call for careful attention in any attempt to understand them. While most of them were spoken near the time of the fall of Jerusalem one of them is dated seventeen years later. In the circumstances it is desirable to consider each of them separately. At the same time it will be helpful to preface consideration of them by a brief epitome of the relations between Israel and Egypt generally.

Dealing only with the times during which Israel was a community rather than a family, they were at first a nation of slaves serving the Egyptians under hard bondage. There, in Egypt, they were in daily contact with Egyptian objects of worship, which included Pharaoh himself, the Nile, and the domestic animals and other animals of the country. After the exodus the relations between the two peoples were probably strained, though there is reason to think that Egypt exercised some political influence in Canaan during certain periods. In the days of the Israelitish monarchy Solomon joined affinity with an Egyptian princess. When the disruption between Judah and Israel took place Jeroboam of Israel set up images of calves at Bethel and Dan on the lines of those worshipped by the Egyptians. When in later years the Assyrians and the Babylonians threatened Israel and Judah, Egypt proved to be an intriguing ally from time to time, promising assistance

to Israel and Judah respectively, and usually failing when the time of crisis arrived.

In the time of Ezekiel Egypt had been among the peoples who had joined in the federation of Syrian and other states to oppose Babylon. Again, however, when the time of crisis arrived, Egypt failed to come to the assistance of her allies.

Israel's prophets constantly warned the people of the folly of trusting the Egyptians, describing their promises as a mere "noise." The warnings were unheeded and the nation suffered.

In the days with which we are concerned here Egypt and Babylon were the two powers that mattered, and Babylon was unquestionably the stronger of the two. Hence the warnings of the prophets as represented by Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel already in Babylon.

II

EGYPT, THE GREAT DRAGON

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 29 : 1-16*)

The prophecy delivered in this section was spoken on the twelfth of the tenth month in the tenth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, that is some six months before the fall of Jerusalem, but while the forces of Nebuchadnezzar were investing the city. It was addressed to Pharaoh and all Egypt. According to a prophecy of Jeremiah the Pharaoh was Hophra (Apries), whose headquarters were at Sais in the delta region. He is described as "the great dragon that lies in the midst of

his stream, that says 'My Nile is my own, I made it,' The claim was characteristic of the Pharaohs: they claimed to be divine. In the king lists of Egypt he is shown as "Haaib-ib-rah, son of the Sun Uah-ib-Ra." Every Pharaoh claimed to be an incarnation of the god Ra, and Ezekiel is only reflecting that claim in the words he put in the mouth of Hophra. The claim was, of course, the reverse of the facts of the case; instead of Pharaoh or Egypt having made the Nile, the Nile had made Egypt. Every year the melting snows in the south caused the river to run deeper, until it overflowed, and carried the fertilizing waters over the land of Egypt, causing it to bring forth the abundant harvests to which its people were accustomed. Thus it supplied their needs, and the needs of Pharaoh. The soil suspended in the Nile waters was the cause of the fertility of the land. Without the Nile there would have been no Egypt. Hophra's claim was, therefore, the reverse of the truth.

The claim of Pharaoh was challenged in the words that follow. Pharaoh, the great dragon, would be caught with hooks and drawn out of the waters with the fish or the river sticking to its scales. The "fish," no doubt, represented the inhabitants of the land, who would be delivered to the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air. In other words, Egypt would be the prey of other peoples.

The reason given for this drastic treatment of Egypt was her failure to carry out her voluntarily given undertakings. Using the language of figure, Ezekiel charges Pharaoh with having been a staff of reed to Israel, when, trusting to their undertakings, they grasped the hand of those who promised support, the reed broke and tore their shoulders, causing their loins to shake. For this reason, said God, "I will bring a sword upon you, and

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

will cut off from you man and beast, and the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste."

In this prediction it will be noticed that no indication is given of the individual, or the nation, that would bring punishment upon Egypt. It was God who was working through others to bring the results home to the people. "I", said God, "will bring a sword upon you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia." Migdol is supposed to have been situated some twelve miles south of Pelusium; Syene was on the borders of Ethiopia.

Later Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon invaded Egypt, though it was some time after the prophecy was spoken. Nothing is definitely known about Egypt being desolate for forty years; this may have been intended to describe the condition of Egypt during the period of Babylonian supremacy in the world. It was to be a limited period, and after it Egypt was to be a lowly kingdom, never again to be exalted above the nations. For a man to speak in this way would have been a daring attempt to define an unlimited future. Yet how truly it has been fulfilled. Nations and kingdoms have arisen and fallen; the whole condition of mankind has changed. Yet the saying has remained true. The country is as fertile as ever, the overflowing of the Nile has continued to provide a fertile land. Yet Egypt has remained small among the nations. The remarkable character of the prediction is emphasized in the following statement. Of ancient Egypt a modern writer has said "The eternal aspect of Egypt . . . was as bright and flourishing as at any former time, but this apparent prosperity did but ill conceal the decay of patriotism and the decline of all the institutions of the nation. Egypt sank ingloriously at

the last, her art, her literature, her national spirit decayed and almost extinct, paying by her early disappearance from among the nations of the earth, the penalty of her extraordinary precocious greatness."

12

BABYLON, TYRE AND EGYPT

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 29 : 17-21*)

Why this prophecy was inserted in this position cannot be said; it was not spoken until some years later, and those that follow were spoken before it. Actually it was given some fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, in the twenty-seventh year of king Jehoiachin's captivity. In the meantime Nebuchadrezzar had besieged Tyre, a siege that lasted for something like thirteen years and even then he had only succeeded in gaining the success of his arms, but not such a success as he had desired.

Ezekiel commences his prophecy with a recognition of this fact. "Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made his army labour hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare, yet neither he, nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labour that he had performed against it." In compensation for this apparently wasted labour, God promised to give the king of Babylon the land of Egypt as recompense.

Very little is known about Nebuchadrezzar's invasion of Egypt. Although he has left numerous inscriptions to tell of his remarkable building operations,

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

he has left very few that tell of his military adventures. This is in accord with what is known about him and his activities. The outstanding picture of him in the book of Daniel shows him standing on the roof of his palace saying, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" One mutilated inscription is known that refers to a military expedition, and that refers to a campaign he fought in Egypt. That expedition took place after the destruction of Jerusalem, for Jeremiah refers to some Jewish refugees making their way into Egypt to whom he spoke words that involved such an expedition.¹

Ezekiel's words imply a highly successful outcome from the king of Babylon's expedition to Egypt. His words finish with the saying, "I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall carry off its wealth, and despoil it, and plunder it, it shall be his wages for his army." In the absence of any clear inscription of Nebuchadrezzar's, any definite account of his expedition is wanting. It is certain that the Egyptians would preserve no account of a battle that may have been fought; nations do not erect monuments to commemorate defeats.

The short prophecy concludes with the words: "On that day I will cause a horn to spring forth to the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then shall they know that I am the Lord."

¹Jer. 43 : 8-13.

NEBUCHADREZZAR AND EGYPT

(Ezekiel, Chapter 30 : 1-19)

No date is attached to this prophecy but, judging from the terms that occur in it, it must have been spoken about the same time as the predictions in section 11—that is, about seven months before the fall of Jerusalem. Although primarily applicable to Egypt it reaches much further afield, including not only Ethiopia, but Put, Lud, Arabia and Libya, all of which were presumably within the limits of Egyptian influence. The various names apply to lands west, south and east of Egypt, in which Egyptian influence was felt. The scope of the prophecy implies that whenever Nebuchadrezzar's invasion of Egypt took place, it affected these lands.

The language in which the prophecies are spoken suggests a calamitous disaster for Egypt and its satellites. "The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord God: 'Wail, Alas for the day ! For the day is near, the day of the Lord is near ; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. A sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be on Ethiopia, when the slain fall in Egypt, and her wealth is carried away, and her foundations are torn down. Ethiopia, and Put, and Lud, and all Arabia, and Libya, and the people of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword.'" The "day of the Lord" usually implies intense suffering ; it obviously does so here. The outcome may have been the forty years of suffering and desolation already referred to. The outcome of the invasion by the armies of Nebuchadrezzar was to be felt from the tower

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

of Syene to Ethiopia away in the south, and among all the people that were in league with Egypt. So dreadful were the depredations of the Babylonians to be that Egypt would be desolate in the midst of desolated countries. Swift moving ships would be used to carry tidings to the unsuspecting Ethiopians of the disaster that had come upon Egypt and its helpers.

The extent of the calamity may be judged by the simile drawn in the prophet's words. It is represented by a traveller using the ships on the Nile, which were noted for their fast travel.¹ The very river which Pharaoh claimed to be his own because he had made it !

As the prophet continued the picture gets more and more impressive. Destruction of idols and images, the objects of Egyptian worship, desolation and fire would all have a part. The language used seems to have been chosen to emphasize the calamities that were to overtake Egypt. Pathros would be a desolation, Zoan would be set on fire, judgment would fall on Thebes and wrath upon Pelusium, while On, Pibeseth and Tehaphnehes would share in the disasters. Thus the pride of Egypt would be broken, and the Egyptians would be made to know that Israel's God was indeed the Lord.

¹Isa. 18 : 2.

PHARAOH'S BROKEN ARM

(Ezekiel, Chapter 30 : 20-26)

If the assumption that the previous section was spoken at the same time as section 11 is correct, the words to be considered now were spoken a few months later, but before the fall of Jerusalem. There is good reason for concluding that the Pharaoh whose arm was broken was Pharaoh Apries, sometimes known as Hophra. From a record in the prophecy of Jeremiah it is known that he came against the Babylonians who were besieging Jerusalem, drawing the army away for a time.¹ It was only a temporary respite for the people of Judah, for, as Jeremiah told Zedekiah's messengers, who were sent to enquire of him, "Behold, Pharaoh's army which came to help you is about to return to Egypt, to its own land." It was to this move by the Egyptians that Ezekiel refers in the words, "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and lo, it has not been bound up to heal it by binding it with a bandage, so that it may become strong to wield the sword." The arm of Pharaoh probably refers to the army that came out of Egypt to cause a diversion of Nebuchadrezzar's forces that had been round Jerusalem. An historian's account of the incident is interesting: "Whether Apries, on finding that the whole Chaldean force had broken up from Jerusalem and was marching against himself, took fright at the danger which he had affronted, and made a sudden inglorious retreat; or whether he boldly met the Babylonian host and contended with them in a pitched battle, wherein he was worsted, and

from which he was forced to fly into his own land, is uncertain."² Whether the arm of Pharaoh is intended to be taken literally, or as an allusion to his army, it was only a beginning. God said, "Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, both the strong arm and that which was broken; and I will make the sword fall from his hand." The first defeat was to be followed by another and more decisive one. The words that follow suggest a complete collapse of the Egyptian armies: "And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, that the arms of Pharaoh shall fall; and they shall know that I am the Lord."

The section ends with the words "I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them throughout the countries. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

¹Jer. 37 : 5 and 6; ²RAWLINSON, *Egypt*, page 363.

15

A LESSON FOR PHARAOH

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 31*)

Continuing his prophecies concerning Egypt, Ezekiel presents Pharaoh with an object lesson. It is an epitome of the history of Assyria. The lesson was given about two months before Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians, and was addressed to Pharaoh and his multitude, that is, to his people. The prophet commences with a question. "Whom are you like in your greatness?" Apries was a son of Necho who had killed Josiah of

Judah at the battle of Carchemish. Ezekiel answered the question himself. "Behold, Assyria (this is undoubtedly the correct reading, though the R.S.V. gives "you") with fair branches and forest shade, and of great height, its top among the clouds." There was a telling object lesson for the Egyptian Pharaoh. Egypt's great days were in the distant past. Then Egyptian Pharaohs had attained to high dominion, but that was almost forgotten history. The parable to be told to Pharaoh Apries had to do with times not far off; times that were no doubt well remembered by the people of the day. In the days of its greatness, which to all appearance had only recently passed, Assyria had been a strong power, imposing its will ruthlessly on many peoples. Ezekiel's description is very impressive. "The waters nourished it, the deep made it grow tall, making its rivers flow, round the place of its planting, sending forth its streams to all the trees of the forest." As the description is read it seems as if Ezekiel could not sufficiently describe its greatness. It towered high, its boughs grew large and its branches long. All the other trees in the garden of God (Eden) could not equal it. The birds of the air made their nests in its branches, and under its shadow dwelt all great nations. Other trees were not able to equal it, not even the cedars. Its roots were sustained by abundant waters. God had made it beautiful in the mass of its branches. It towered high and its top reached the clouds. Yet it was given into the hand of a "mighty one" of the nations who would do with its wickedness as it deserved.

Where was it now? In a state of complete collapse! The peoples that had been subject to it found themselves free from its dominion. Its collapse had been sudden, and the leading power in accomplishing that collapse had

been Babylon! And Pharaoh had challenged Babylon, but his "arm" had been broken, and there was no hope for it in the days to come.

A modern poet had caught the spirit of Ezekiel's words and expressed them thus:—

Behold our progress ! the Assyrian cried, viewing
beneath the brilliant blazing sky
The lofty towers, the walls of sun-burnt brick,
the brazen gates, the ponderous ramparts high,
The roll of chariots in the narrow ways, the
glittering crowd close thronging mart and street,
The gleaming flash of spears beneath the sun,
the shaking tread of conquering legions' feet—
"Behold our progress ! and enlightenment,
We are the people ! We shall surely stand !"
And speaking thus they passed.

The moon shines cold above the desert sands,
The thin winds whimper lone across the waste;
The shifting dunes long since have rolled and closed
Above dead corpses ages long effaced.

The fall of Assyria was one of the object lessons of human history. Would Pharaoh profit by it? In highly figurative language Ezekiel drew a picture of the fall of an Empire. In the history of mankind it was a typical illustration of the passing of human greatness. After the fall of Nineveh the headquarters of the Empire were moved to Harran, and in a few years the Empire came to an ignominious end. Did Pharaoh of Egypt imagine his power would continue?

The lesson of the allegory is briefly expressed. "Whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? You shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the nether world; you shall lie

among the uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, says the Lord God."

16

A LAMENTATION OVER PHARAOH
AND EGYPT

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 32*)

In the year following the fall of Jerusalem, **Ezekiel** was told to raise a lamentation over Pharaoh. He was to say, "You consider yourself a lion among the nations, but you are like a dragon in the seas; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their rivers." In the events with which the Pharaoh of Egypt had been associated recently there was little of the characteristics of the lion, but if the dragon was a term applied to the crocodile the simile was apt. A crocodile can, and does, stir up the mire when it disturbs the water as it lashes it with its tail. The failure of Apries in his conflict with the Babylonian armies was more like the outcome of a crocodile's lashing tail than that of a lion's efforts.

The lamentation continues: "Thus says the Lord God,; I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples; and I will haul you up in my dragnet." In an earlier section Pharaoh had been represented as a great dragon lying in the midst of its streams, boasting that the Nile was his, and that he had made it. Now he

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

would be unable to use such statements, for God will throw His net over him, dragging him from his waters, and casting him on to the fields where he would be out of his element, unable to fend for himself, he would lie open to the attack of the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, so that his carcase would be as flesh strewn upon the mountains or in the valleys. While this was happening Pharaoh would be helpless; he would be blotted out as the earth was drenched with his blood, and the watercourses filled with it. It is a picture of complete helplessness. Looking at Egypt and its rulers in that figure, Ezekiel said,

When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens,

And make their stars dark:

I will cover the sun with a cloud,

And the moon shall not give its light.

All the bright lights of heaven

Will I make dark over you

And put darkness upon your land,

says the Lord God.

Nothing is known definitely about the condition of Egypt immediately after its conflicts with Babylon; it existed as a nation, but oblivion seems to have fallen over its history for a time. According to the prophet its condition would "trouble the hearts of many peoples, whose kings would be caused to shudder because of them." The pride of Egypt was to come to naught, yet later, their waters were to be made clear.

The lamentation over Pharaoh is followed by a dirge over Egypt, though according to the date assigned to it this was spoken at the beginning of the year, whereas the lamentation was pronounced at the end of the year. The month is not referred to in the Hebrew text, but is supplied by the Septuagint.

A LAMENTATION OVER PHARAOH

Ezekiel was told to "wail over the multitude of Egypt" who had gone down to the nether world to join those who had gone there in past days. The dirge commences with some words addressed to the Egyptian people: "Whom do you surpass in beauty? Go down, and be laid with the uncircumcised." There they joined others who perished in the various wars of the past. The language is impressive. The mighty chiefs of nations who were in Sheol are represented as speaking to the Egyptians as they joined the multitudes who had arrived before them. There, as Ezekiel said, "They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword." Still and silent they were in Sheol, yet in a figure they are represented as giving a silent greeting to the equally silent Egyptians as they join the unconscious dead.

Ezekiel commences with Assyria, the greatest of them all. His words are, "Assyria is there, and all her company, their graves round about her, all of them slain, fallen by the sword: whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit, and her company is round about her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living." There is a significant difference between the words applied to Assyria and those found in the passages that follow. Assyria has its "company"; some who follow have their "multitude." There was evidently some reason for the change. Assyria was an empire, ruling with despotic sway over tributary peoples who were compelled to join her armies and fight her battles. The peoples mentioned later, Elam, Meshech and Tubal, Edom and others, were not great conquering nations who could compel subject races to assist in their campaigns—hence the substitution of multitudes for company.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Similar words are addressed to the others, but a comment where there is some variation will suffice. Asshur is followed by Elam. In this case there is an addition, "they bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit." Elam is followed by Meshech and Tubal, who will come before readers later in the prophet's sayings, and will be considered then. In their case there is a difference that should be noted. It is said, they do not lie with the fallen mighty men of old, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose shields are upon their bones, for the "terror of the mighty men was in the land of the living." Meshech and Tubal, distant peoples, were probably less civilised than the people living in the lands of Mesopotamia, that is in the countries of the Euphratean and Tigris valleys. Their habits were rougher and less modified by the customs of the more cultivated people.

Meshech and Tubal are followed by Edom; the list is completed by the princes of the north and all the Zidonians. Of these nothing special is recorded.

So the list of waiting peoples is completed: all that remained was to refer to the arrival in Sheol of Pharaoh and his hosts to join the great company of the dead. That is recorded in the words that complete the dirge. "When Pharaoh sees them, he will comfort himself for all his multitude, Pharaoh and his army, slain by the sword. For he spread terror in the land of the living, therefore he shall be laid among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, says the Lord God."

The poet quoted previously may be referred to again, he has summed up the case of Egypt in the following words:—

A LAMENTATION OVER PHARAOH

Behold our progress ! Hear proud Egypt's boast ;
Temples and pyramids and painted stone ;
Column on column reared beside the Nile,
Throughout the world for wealth and science known ;
Rich galleys clustering on the Nile's flood ;
Learning and wisdom sheltered in the halls ;
Vast monuments of power on every hand ;
Ranked gods of stone and massive sculptured walls
"Behold our progress and enlightenment !
We are the people ! we shall surely stand."
And speaking thus, they passed.
The jackal howls among the fallen stones,
The painted tombs no longer guard their dead ;
The desert winds disport the mummy dust ;
The gods are fallen and their glory fled !
The bats of even flitter forth from halls
where aged shreds of human clay are thrown ;
The silken sails and gilded galley poles
Have crumpled, like the builders, into dust.

PART III

I

SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES

In this section of the writings of Ezekiel only one date is mentioned to indicate when any particular message or prediction was spoken, and that was to indicate when a certain event took place, namely the fall of Jerusalem. It was not the day the city fell, but that on which a messenger arrived among the captives by the Chebas and gave them the news, "The city is smitten". Unless there has been some corruption of the text during the ages since the Prophet's days, it took about a year and a half for the news to travel from Judea to Tel Abib. So long a time is not likely as there seems to have been frequent communication between the people of Jerusalem and the exiles. Some manuscripts read the eleventh year instead of the twelfth, and this may be the correct reading.

The effect of the news upon the captives must have been drastic. False prophets had buoyed them up with hopes of an early fall of Babylon. Two of them are named by Jeremiah, Ahab the son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah.¹ Now there could be no further scepticism on the matter, Ezekiel's words had proved true. All his announcements of evil had been confirmed. Presumably he was listened to with more patience than in the past. What had he to say of the future? That is, to some extent, the burden of his messages to the Jews in Babylon from this time onward. His words were to sustain them in the evil times of captivity. He was to give them a message of hope,

directing their attention from the evils of the past and present to hopes that might sustain them while they bore the evils of the time. He was no longer a preacher of woe, but a messenger of hope. He gave no indication of the length of time they would have to wait for the better things of which he spoke, but the change in the character of his message would make him a welcome bringer of good tidings.

¹Jer. 29 : 21.

2

THE DUTIES OF A PROPHET

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 33 : 1-20*)

The section of Ezekiel's writings now to be considered may be regarded as a line of separation between two different kinds of prophecy, something like a watershed separating two river systems that flow in different directions. Hitherto the general note has been one of condemnation; from this point it is usually one of restoration and blessing. What was to be the Prophet's duty in the changed circumstances?

Looking at the matter generally, he was to be what he had been in the past, a watchman noting the conduct of the people, rebuking the evils and encouraging their attempts to follow correct ways of conduct. There was, however, a change. Hitherto his words had been received with incredulity, now they were calculated to encourage a spirit of hopefulness. He was to infuse a

new spirit in the exiles, a spirit that looked forward instead of dwelling on the evils of the past and present.

The essential teaching of this section is based on the duties of a watchman. Addressing Ezekiel God said, "Son of man, speak to your people and say unto them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman; and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people; then if any one who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head." The principle underlying the statement cannot be questioned, the watchman has carried out his duty; he has discharged his responsibility. The trouble in such a case lay on the individual who failed to heed the warning.

There are more lessons than one to be gathered from these words. God said "When I bring a sword upon a land." Peace and war, with all the dangers attendant upon the latter, are not due solely to man; the controlling influence is with God who puts down and sets up men and nations in a way that will ultimately bring into existence a situation that will result in the fulfilment of His purposes on earth. Having expressed this principle, God indicated Ezekiel's position as a prophet. "So you, Son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel: whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand." The prophet was in the position occupied by the watchman in the illustration that had been given. The principle runs

through all times. Today there are individuals who are in the position of watchmen. Their responsibility is real, and they cannot avoid it. An illustration may be found in the New Testament. When Paul was on his way to Jerusalem he arranged to interview the elders of the church in Ephesus, and warned them of their duties toward the believers who formed the flock in their charge. His words were clear. "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which He obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, . . . Therefore be alert."¹ Whether or not the elders or their flock took the warning Paul discharged his responsibility. The principle is as real today as it was in the days of Ezekiel and of Paul.

The captives in Babylon seem to have raised some objection to the words of Ezekiel. He was therefore told to say to them, "Thus have you said; Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" The prophet was told to reply, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Much more followed. It is summed up in a saying that has occurred before: "It is the last lap that counts". A life of well doing may be thrown away by an evil ending; on the other hand, a life of evil may be overlooked if a true repentance is manifested in its final days.

¹Acts 20 : 28 and 29.

THE REMNANT IN JERUSALEM

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 33 : 21-33*)

After Ezekiel had received the message concerning the duties of watchmen and prophets he tells us how he learned of the fall of Jerusalem. According to the record given in the book he received it in the twelfth year of the captivity, the tenth month, and the fifth day of the month, that is about a year and a half after the date the city was taken by the Babylonians. As there seems to have been frequent communication between the Jews in the homeland and those in Babylon the length of time seems unreasonable. Some manuscripts, however, are said to read the eleventh year, which would still allow something like six months for the news to have reached him. Ezekiel informs us that on the evening before the fugitive came to him the hand of the Lord had been upon him so that his mouth was opened and he was no longer dumb. The event was a crisis in his life; he was now free to speak at all times.

Apparently immediately afterwards the word of the Lord came to him with a message. It concerned the attitude of the remnant of the people who were allowed to remain in the land. They must have been comparatively few in number, because the people as a whole were carried into captivity in Babylon, and these included most of the higher classes of the population. Those who were engaged in tilling the soil, with a few of the better classes to act as rulers under the direction of the Babylonian overlords, were left behind. The remnant who were in the land seem to have entirely

misread the position; they concluded that they were now inheriting the land, and that they would continue to do so. They were few, of course, but then, Abraham had been but one individual, yet he had possession of the land. So now, though few as compared with what they had been, they were many, and the land was theirs !

The argument was a strange one, and took no notice of the facts of the case. Their basis was quite wrong. As Stephen said in his trial before the Sanhedrin centuries later, "God gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length."¹ Their argument, however, was satisfactory to themselves; they were in the land and it was their inheritance ! Ezekiel was given the answer to their assumption; it was to the effect that they were breaking laws that had been given them in the past, the moral laws and those that were more or less ceremonial; should they then possess the land? Then speaking in the name of God Ezekiel was to say, "Thus says the Lord God, As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and him that is in the open field I will give to the beasts of the earth to be devoured, and those who are in the stronghold and in caves shall die by the pestilence." The land was to become a desolation, their "proud might" would come to an end, and the land would become so that none would pass through it !

The words were fulfilled. The governor appointed by the Babylonians was murdered and, fearing the vengeance of the Babylonian monarch, many who had been left there by the Babylonian commander fled to Egypt. When, some seventy years later, some forty thousand journeyed from Babylon to Judea in response to the decree of Cyrus of Persia, they found the land empty and desolate, and the few who may still have

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

been left were subject to the Samaritan governor. The land was a desolation and a waste.

The words of Ezekiel, telling of what would be, made little impression on those who heard them. This was made clear in the words addressed to the Prophet. "Son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and about the doors of their houses, say one to another, come and hear what the word is that comes forth from the Lord!" They did not speak in that way because they believed Ezekiel when he addressed them. As God told him, their hearts were only set on what they could gain. So God ended with the words: "Lo, you are to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; they hear what you say, but they will not do it." He was just an entertaining speaker whose words they heard as they would a musician. There was, however, something more, for God added, "When this comes—and come it will—then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

For the time being they were satisfied. Life in Babylon was not too bad.

¹Acts 7 : 5.

SHEPHERDS AND FLOCKS— THE GOOD SHEPHERD

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 34*)

This section may be regarded as the real turning point in the prophecies of Ezekiel. There is no indication of the time in which the words were spoken, though it was probably during the reign of Zedekiah, as the terms that occur in it do not harmonize with the conditions that prevailed in Judah when Gedaliah was governing the province on the appointment of Nebuchadrezzar. Gedaliah was a man of a very different character from the kings who succeeded Josiah. Jehoakim was a tyrant and Zedekiah weak and vacillating; there was no leadership from him. "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." The language of the section would fit in with any of the period that elapsed between the reign of Josiah and the fall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel tells us that the word of the Lord came to him and told him to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. He was to say "Thus saith the Lord God, Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the flock?" The words were not intended to apply to the kings alone; they applied also to the princes and nobles of the land; indeed they were particularly appropriate to the princes and nobles who surrounded Zedekiah, the "bad figs" of the object lesson given to Jeremiah.¹ They sought their own good and cared little for the people. Ezekiel's words were "The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not

bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them, so they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts."

When the rulers and nobles of the country had neglected their duties in such a way, what was to be done with them? The answer to the question follows. God would be against the shepherds; He would require His sheep at their hands; the shepherds would no longer feed themselves, and the sheep would be rescued from their mouths.

That was to be the immediate future; it found an immediate fulfilment in the captivity. There the shepherds were mixed with the sheep in a common ruin, and, if the treatment of Zedekiah and his nobles may be taken as an illustration of what happened generally the shepherds suffered grievously. The words that follow imply something like this; God intimated that He would require His sheep at their hands.

It should be noticed that the terms used are very definite. "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will *I* seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness, And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land."

More is involved in these words than happened when Cyrus issued his decree permitting Jews to return to their land. There is a suggestion of discrimination in some of the words that follow. God will judge between sheep and sheep, rams and he-goats. Some trod down

the pastures and fouled the water. There is to be a judgment between the fat and the lean, between sheep and sheep.

The outcome is specifically attributed to God. "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken." The reiteration of the first person singular in the saying emphasizes the fact that the outcome of the matter is essentially the work of God. The allusion is essentially Messianic, and is a key to much that follows. "My servant" is the Servant of the Lord who occupies a leading position in a section of the book of Isaiah—despised and rejected at one time, wounded for the transgressions of others, yet triumphing at last as the will of the Lord prospers in his hand.² Shepherd and Prince, the good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep; he will be the God-given deliverer who will secure the great change pictured by Ezekiel in fulfilment of the sayings found in this chapter.

Once started on these lines, much followed: a covenant of peace ensuring security in the wilderness and peaceful sleep in the woods, the places around God's holy hill a blessing, culminating in showers of blessing, trees yielding their fruit, and Israel dwelling securely in the land, none making them afraid. The final words of the section round off the ideas suggested by the language used: "And they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel are my people, says the Lord God. And you are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God."

¹Jer. 24; ²Isa. 53.

JUDGMENT ON MOUNT SEIR

(Ezekiel, Chapter 35)

The inclusion of this section at this juncture may seem somewhat strange, seeing that practically all sayings concerning other nations are included in the chapters dealt with in part II of this exposition, and that in the predictions concerning the nations something has been included concerning Mount Seir. As the section is reviewed a reason for the inclusion at this point may become apparent. It will be noticed that the future of Mount Seir is pictured in a way that goes far beyond the descriptions of the future of the nations generally.

One reason for this difference is given early in the section: "Because you cherished perpetual enmity," an enmity that reached back to the time when Esau and Jacob were brothers living in the same home; when, indeed, they had been the twin produce of the womb of their mother. Where there should have been close fraternity there was from the commencement enmity, an enmity for which there was no basis then, whatever may have happened later. As, however, it developed in them there were divergencies of character that made them incompatible personalities, so in the races that sprang from them, the differences developed, and at the time of Ezekiel, reached a crisis, a crisis that cannot be better illustrated than is done in a Psalm written by one who was a fellow captive with Ezekiel in Babylon. After recounting his sufferings in Babylon when asked to sing one of the songs of Zion, he suddenly broke out:—

Remember O Lord, against the Edomites
 the day of Jerusalem,
 How they said, "Rase it, rase it,
 Down to its foundations."
 O daughter of Babylon, you devastator!
 Happy shall he be who requites you
 With what you have done to us!
 Happy shall be he who takes your little ones
 And dashes them against the rock.¹

In Ezekiel's words God's views are expressed, for He says, "Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the Lord." Theirs had been a perpetual enmity, an enmity that had endured, as the song of the captive showed, to the very days of the prophet. For that perpetual hatred they would be prepared for blood, blood was to pursue them because they were guilty of blood. The reiteration of the word "blood" is impressive.

The section is occupied with a constant repetition of threats of desolation; mountains, hills, valleys and ravines were to be scenes of bloodshed, and Seir itself was to be a perpetual desolation. These with slight alterations of expression, go on until the end is reached, and the final judgment passed. "Thus says the Lord God, For the rejoicing of the whole earth I will make you desolate. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you, you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then shall they know that I am the Lord."

¹Psalm 137 : 7-9.

THE REVIVAL OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

(Ezekiel, Chapter 36)

In a previous section Ezekiel had dealt with the people of Israel under the figure of sheep, and their rulers in the position of shepherds. Now he turns to the land.

The land of Canaan, or Israel, is described in many ways in the course of the Bible. Expressions are used such as "a land flowing with milk and honey", the "glory of all lands," "a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven," "a land which the Lord thy God cares for," "the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it." Although the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, yet He calls the land of Israel "My land." Owing to its situation and its peculiar formation, consisting of mountains and hills, plains and valleys, including the deep rift of the Jordan Valley, it has an unusual variety of climates and productions. Even in a time of severe famine Jacob was able to send "a little balm, a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds," as a present to the "man" that supplied them with corn. In the days of Ezekiel the land had fallen into desolation, not because of any change in its situation, but as a consequence of the iniquities of its inhabitants and the providential working that attended the captivity.

The desolate state of the country caused rejoicing among the various peoples around, as was illustrated in the attitude of the Edomites. Ezekiel was, however, told to prophesy, saying, "O mountains of Israel, hear the word

of the Lord God: Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations round about: therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I speak in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations, therefore I swear that the nations that are round about you shall themselves suffer reproach."

On the other hand there was to be a revival of the land. That revival is referred to in words Ezekiel spoke in the name of the Lord. "But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home." To this he added, "Behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown, and I will multiply men upon you, the whole house of Israel, all of it, the cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt . . . Then you will know that I am the Lord."

Once again it should be noted that there is something ideal in the language used, and that in the fulfilment the whole house of Israel is to participate. In the past men had said of it "You devour men and you bereave your nation of children." To this God replied that the land should no longer act in that way. He would not let them be such a reproach and the nation should no longer be caused to stumble.

The message intended to be conveyed is clear. In the past Israel had defiled the land by its conduct; as a consequence God's wrath had been poured on them and their land. The people had been scattered through other countries. But there was to be a change. By way of explanation it is said: "Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

to act, but for the sake of my holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came." What followed was to happen for the vindication of God's name and of His holiness. So He added, "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land." The saying does not end there; promises of far-reaching effect follow. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall be my people, and I will be your God."

When that takes place blessings of all kinds will be bestowed upon them. As another prophet expresses it, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God."¹

Before such things are realized there must be a great change in the people of Israel. They will "loathe themselves" for their conduct in the past. God will not carry out the purposes He has for their sakes, or because of what they have done. Yet the land that was desolate will be tilled and become like the garden of Eden. "Then," said God, "the nations that are left shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was desolate; I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it."

THE REVIVAL OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

One thing more is added: God will increase them like a flock, like the flock of holy things (see margin), like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that He is the Lord.

¹Isa. 35 : 1 and 2.

7A

THE RESURRECTION OF THE NATION

(Ezekiel, Chapter 37)

In the development that leads to the final stage of Ezekiel's writings the revival of the land requires a similar revival of a people to occupy it. This aspect of the development of the purpose of God is represented by one of the most graphic chapters of Ezekiel's prophecies. In the previous chapter it was said "the land that was desolate shall be tilled." A tilled land requires a people to work it and bring to what is the result in productivity. In essence the work is God's, but men are the instruments to be used in the process.

Ezekiel tells how he felt the hand of the Lord upon him, and carried him away by the Spirit, setting him down in what is said to have been the midst of a valley. The word for "valley" is, in the Hebrew, the same as that translated "plain" in earlier sections of the book.¹ It was appropriate that the vision now to be given was seen in the same place as former visions. In the past they were to culminate in the dispersion of the nation:

now that the dispersion was to be reversed, Ezekiel was taken in spirit to the same viewpoint.

The sight that met his eyes was a strange one, the whole valley was full of dry bones. There is nothing pleasing in the sight of a collection of bones; to see the whole landscape strewn with them must have been about as depressing as any sight could have been. Ezekiel was not only shown the scene from a particular point; the Spirit led him among them that he might appreciate their dryness, and their apparent hopelessness. Then the question was put, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel had seen sufficient of the works of God to restrain him from giving a negative answer; he replied therefore, "O Lord God, thou knowest." He was then told to speak to the scattered bones, he was to say to them, "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

It was a strange procedure to be told to adopt, but Ezekiel was getting used to strange sights and sounds. So he did as he was told. In graphic terms he tells what happened. "There was a noise, and behold a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone." Then sinews appeared upon the bony frames, and skin covered them, a collection of lifeless bodies filling the whole valley. Then a second command came, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." It should be noted that the command did not say "these dead," but "these slain." Ezekiel did as

he was commanded, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet—"an exceeding great host"!

The whole description is so graphic that, coming where it does in the prophet's writings, an explanation seems hardly necessary; yet the explanation is given, and in almost the same detail as in the figure. That it was supplied indicates that there should be no misunderstanding its meaning. The bones represented the whole house of Israel, hopeless and dead, "clean cut off". Yet, they are to live, raised from their dead state and brought into the land that had been theirs. God's Spirit was to enter into them that they might live, and live in their own land.

At this point another figure is introduced. The Prophet was told to take two sticks. On one he was to write, "For Judah and the children of Israel associated with him." On the other, "For Joseph the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel associated with him." He was then to join them together into one stick, so that it would be made one in their sight. The meaning was given: "Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all sides, and bring them to their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer be divided into two kingdoms." Thus united, freed from the old idolatries that had defiled them in the past, they would be cleansed and become once more the people of God.

One thing more was added, something that connected them with the matters referred to in Section IV. The words continued, "My servant David shall be king

over them; and they shall all have one shepherd," they should dwell in the land promised to their fathers, with David established as their king for ever. In this prophecy king and prince are interchangeable terms, as they are in the prophecy of Ezekiel generally.

Before the end of the section is reached, a new idea, or rather the renewal of an old one, is introduced. Hundreds of years before, David, in what are known as his last words, said, "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light . . . He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure."² So now Ezekiel says, "I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore."

There is, in these words, an impressive collection of ideas; a restoration of kingship to the line of David, a sanctuary established in the midst of the people, a covenant of peace, a dwelling-place for God. Taken together these ideas point to the future development to which the book of Ezekiel leads, the time when Jerusalem will be known by a new name, that of Yahweh Shammah—the Lord is there. No picture of any temporary application could answer to the ideas expressed by such words.

¹Ezek. 3 : 22 and 8 : 4 ; ²2Samuel 23 : 2-5.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE NATION IN HISTORY

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 37*)

The picture of the valley of dry bones as given in the foregoing section has been set forth solely from the Biblical point of view without any attempt to identify it with historical circumstances. It has seemed well to do this to preserve the unity of the Prophet's words. In this section it is proposed to examine certain events which originated in the last part of the nineteenth century and are still in process of development. They have a distinct bearing upon some of the ideas expressed in the vision seen by the prophet.

In his Hebrew Melodies, Byron wrote:
Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,
How shall ye flee away and be at rest?
The wild dove hath his nest, the fox his cave,
Mankind their country—Israel but the grave.

The words well express the state of Israel during the period that followed the dispersal of the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70. In lands all through the world they have been recognised as wandering Jews, in most lands subject to persecution from time to time. Imperial Russia, for example, by its bitter persecution of the Jews called forth from a Jewish poet the words:

How long, O Lord, shall darkness reign
And murder rage unchecked?
How long, O Lord, by crimson stain
Our fateful page be flecked ?

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

How long, O Lord, shall Justice sleep
And Truth her head abase?
How long, O Lord, into the deep
Shall sink Thy chosen race ?

At the time these words were penned there was little or no sign of a change taking place. Yet the words of Ezekiel made it clear that sooner or later a change was to come. They showed also that the change was not to be a sudden reversal of the situation in the world, but a gradual process.

At the end of the nineteenth century there were a comparatively few Jewish settlements in Palestine. They were on a small scale, that gave little sign of much progress. Any question about their future development might have called forth the reply Ezekiel gave to God's question, "O Lord God, thou knowest." Towards the end of the century there was a noise: a very small one it is true, but it was heard by some who were waiting for developments in Palestine. A Dr. Theodore Herzl, moved by the sufferings of his fellow Jews, asked a question. There was a land, Palestine, sadly needing people to change its condition. In the long past it had been a land flowing with milk and honey; then it was largely derelict. There was, at the same time, a people without a home they could call their own. Why not bring the land and the people together? The idea seized the imagination of many of his fellow Jews and others, and what was known as the Zionist movement came into being as a political force.

A stream of Jewish emigrants made its way to the land of the fathers of the Jewish race; the stream increased, and what had been a barren land began to show signs of comparative prosperity. The settlers were mostly from countries where they had been subject to

persecution, though many who lived in lands where they were suffered to live in peace joined in the stream. Industries, as well as agriculture, were established, and thrived. The story of these developments is too long to be recorded here, but it was more or less steady.

Then a sudden explosion took place. An Austrian Archduke was murdered and, what has been called the first World War commenced. When that war had run its course for some time the British government gave notice that if it and its allies were successful in the war it would view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. Britain and its allies proved to be victorious. There was, however, a proviso; Palestine was the home of Arab tribes, and had been so for centuries. Provision had to be made for this, as the Arabs had supported Britain and her allies. In the circumstances it was necessary for some arrangement to be made to meet this point.

The solution that was adopted was that a Mandate was given to Great Britain to look after the interests of Palestine. One of the conditions in the Mandate reads as follows :

“An appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognized as a public body for the purpose of advising and co-operating with the administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may effect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine, and subject always to the Administration, to assist and take part in the development of the country.”

To meet the qualification of this clause the Zionist Organisation was chosen as the “appropriate Jewish Agency.”

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

It was a step forward, but it fell short of the fulfilment of Jewish desires or the terms of the process described by Ezekiel in his vision of the dry bones he had seen on the open field. Bones had come together, but another stage was to be reached before the process could be considered to have fulfilled that which was seen in figure by Ezekiel.

The position created by the mandate, however, gave a great filip to the development of Palestine. Jews had a place which was ready to receive them, and where they could live and work for the benefit of the race. Numbers made their way to the land of their fathers. Industries grew up in the land, prosperity crowned their efforts. Then Britain decided to give up the mandate which it had accepted. It seemed like putting the clock back; actually it led to a further development of the process seen by Ezekiel in figure. A new organization that had been set up after a second world-war—the United Nations, decided to recognize Israel as a nation, and a member of its body. Its territory was limited, but Israel was a nation! It had its own government; its own parliament and institutions. The dry bones became alive! It was not all that might have been hoped for, but Israel was once more a nation in its own right. It was no longer a collection of dry bones, nor of lifeless bodies.

It was not, of course, a fulfilment of the process enacted before the prophet. Israel still waited for a David; it waited, too, for the everlasting covenant to be recognized. It waited for the development required to complete the picture with which the prophet brought his words to an end. "Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore."

GOG—THE LAND OF MAGOG

(*Ezekiel, Chapters 38 and 39*)

The section that comes after the description of the resurrection of the dead bones of Israel, followed by the account of the erection of a house of prayer for all nations, brings before readers an extraordinary picture that seems quite out of place. Between Israel restored and the time when the tabernacle of God shall be with men, Ezekiel speaks of a development that seems to be in conflict with it. It is, as it were, a backward glance at events that have to take place before the final purpose of God on earth can be realised. Human passions are strong, and human efforts to control events as they desire are so determined, that the thoughtful reader will realize the inevitability of something of the kind taking place. It will be recalled that at the end of the processes mentioned in the previous section, God had said, "Then the nations will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel." Israel, however, has many enemies among the nations of the earth, and the knowledge referred to in these words is not easily acquired. It has to be learned by experience, and the experience is sometimes bitter. It is to be so in this instance.

The events that will produce the experience were to take place "after many days," and "in the latter years."¹ Both these expressions point to a time long after the days of the prophet. The matter is introduced by the words, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." It is well known that the word translated

"chief" is *Rosh* or *Ros*. Dean Stanley wrote many years ago, "The name Russ, Hebrew Roas, LXX Ros, unfortunately mistranslated in the English version 'the chief,' first appears in Ezekiel 38 : 2 and 39 : 1. It is the only name of a modern nation that appears in the Old Testament."² Gibbon also says, "Among the Greeks this national appellation (Russians) has a singular form Ros."³ Other names that occur in connection with Ros point in the same direction. Josephus says Magog founded the Scythians, a people who inhabited the country known as Scythia, that is the lands associated with the rivers now known as the Don and the Danube.

Mesech and Tubal, which are next mentioned, were among the places with which Tyre was engaged in its commercial affairs; they are also joined in the lamentation over Egypt.⁴ They are generally associated with the area between the Black and Caspian Seas. Other peoples associated with Gog are Gomer and Beth-togarmah. Josephus associates the former with "those whom the Greeks call Galatians," whose lands were situate in Asia Minor; others associate them with the district of the Caucasus, which accords with Ezekiel's statement, "Togarmah of the north quarters." All the names mentioned so far point to one direction, that of Russia and adjoining areas. As the prophet proceeded other peoples and districts are mentioned, Persia Cush and Put, probably Punt. The inclusion of these suggests a great combination of peoples in Europe, Asia and Africa, joined with Rosh to participate in an invasion of the "land that is restored from war." That is, a land that has seen much warfare, but which has revived, and has been brought into cultivation and production; one that has evidently attained a considerable degree of success and prosperity. The description is worth noting;

the land to be invaded by the hosts described had been a "perpetual waste," its people had been "brought out from the nations and now dwell securely." Against such a land and the people who had restored it to its ancient productiveness, Gog would come like a storm covering the land, with all his hordes and many people with him. Moved by his "thoughts" he will devise an evil scheme, a scheme that seems sure of success. The thoughts will be as expressed in the words put into his lips. "I will go up against the land of unwalled villages; I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates." Success seems certain; what can a tiny people whose energies have been devoted to rescuing the land from its ancient desolation do against hosts gathered from so many peoples?

Before replying to the question it will be worth while to look at what other prophets of Israel have said about a somewhat similar position. In the immediate context God says, "Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring *you* against them?" The question suggests that other prophets must have referred to such a crisis coming on the nation. A glance at what they have said will prepare for what Ezekiel says about the crisis he is describing. Isaiah gives one illustration. He had said, "On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished." To this he adds, "Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders he will mani-

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

fest his glory.”⁵ Under the figure of an invasion of locusts, Joel had spoken of a time when a nation would come against God’s land reducing it to desolation. It would be a time of desolation, darkness and gloom; but as Joel said, “I (God) will remove the Northerner far from you, and drive him into a patched and desolate land, his front into the eastern sea, and his rear into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.”⁶ In that same time of crisis, the Lord “roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.”⁷ Taking these as specimens of the things spoken by the prophets of Israel in former days, we may conclude that they indicate an invasion of Palestine by a latter day Assyrian and his many peoples.

A somewhat vague allusion to time is given: “After many days.” It is quite indefinite; it might mean many days after the first movements among the dry bones. Whatever interval is to elapse between the two events, Gog is to bring his followers of the peoples named against the “land that is restored from war, the land where people were gathering from many nations upon the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; its people were brought out from the nations and now dwell securely, all of them.” The comparative security of the land moves Gog to think an evil thought, or “devise an evil scheme,” saying “I will go up against the land of unwalled villages, I will fall upon this quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls.” To adapt the prophecy to modern conditions, the people are living in peaceable security, and have gained cattle and goods by peaceful means, and live “at the centre of the earth.” There is something significant in

the last phrase. In a small publication, circulated privately over forty years ago, it was said, "The unique character of Palestine, or in the larger sense, Syria, is that its geographically central position has been emphasized in all historical periods . . . In our own times, when all the earth has been explored and made to contribute to the needs of man, particularly the European, the central position of Syria is again emphasized. The land of the Five Seas,⁸ . . . is a great centre of world movement, and within it, the strategic area, is the land of Palestine."

At this point another combination of peoples is introduced. "Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its villages will say unto you, Have you come to seize spoil?" So it reads in the R.S.V. The Authorised Version reads "with all the young lions thereof." There can be no doubt that the authorised Version is correct, although the Hebrew word *may* represent villages, and it will be taken here to be rightly translated in the A.V. The question is in the nature of a challenge; it implies that the challengers have some right to issue a challenge, for the word "come" is used. Had the mandate remained in operation it would have been easy to recognise the right of Britain to challenge any power or powers that attempted to invade Palestine; in the circumstances as they exist at the time of writing, the basis of the challenge is the right of a strong people to help a smaller one in distress.

Great Britain is a mercantile nation; it has long used a lion as its emblem. It has developed colonies, now dominions, who may aptly be spoken of as young lions. It is true that Tarshish was in the days of Ezekiel a somewhat loosely applied name, being used for more than one place in, and near, the Mediterranean with which the Tyrians traded, and there is no doubt that those

ships traded also with Britain, If, therefore, the application to Britain is not absolutely sure, it is extremely likely, and there is no other power in these days to which it might be applied. It may therefore be assumed with confidence that the challenging power is Britain and the members of her commonwealth of nations.

The other names mentioned are not strictly definite. Sheba and Dedan were Arabian areas in the time of the prophet. Sheba answers fairly closely to Aden, one of Britain's outposts of Empire. Dedan is shown as a possible Arabian area on a map of the early peoples of the world. It cannot, therefore, be brought in as a definite item of evidence. But putting all the evidence available together, few will question the appropriateness of seeing in the challenging power an allusion to the British Commonwealth of nations. Palestine being situated where it is, and Britain being essentially a trading country, any challenge to its trading facilities would be a serious one.

That there was a use of the term Tarshish of ships sailing eastward is true; their destination was India or Ceylon, both of which are within the British Commonwealth. The challenge to the Russian threat essentially concerns the Western Tarshish.

The issue of the conflict with Russia and her satellites is not referred to; the outcome does not depend on human efforts. Ezekiel indicates the source from which the greater challenge is to come. When Gog, the land of Magog, and all its followers threaten the Jews in their ancient country, then brought back from the sword, Ezekiel says, "Thus saith the Lord God, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, God's wrath will be roused." His words describing God's reaction are exceedingly strong, "In my jealousy and in my blazing

wrath I declare, on that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel." The shaking is described in violent terms, "the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground." Every kind of terror will be kindled against Gog. Sword, pestilence and bloodshedding will all have their place in the judgment, torrential rain and hailstones, accompanied by fire and brimstone will all have their place in the destruction of Gog and his hordes. "So," said God, "I will show my greatness and my holiness, and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then will they know that I am the Lord."

It will be the end of a long conflict. God and His purposes have been little regarded in the world. With the terrible end of Gog and his hosts, man will learn a lesson that will long remain, at all events during the Millennial reign of God's representative, who will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is expressed in the concluding verses of the judgment on Gog: "My holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let my holy name be profaned any more, and the nations shall know that I am the Lord God. That is the day of which I have spoken."

There is an eloquent sound about the last sentence. Over and over again has God caused prophets and Psalmists to portray in human speech some idea of the future He has in store for mankind. Perhaps the best way to impress the human mind with something of its wonder, is to use words repeated by the Apostle Paul: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit." It was something concerned with those things that he also said it was not lawful for man to utter.⁹

¹Ezek. 38 : 8; ²STANLEY, *Eastern Church*, page 280; ³GIBBON's *Roman Empire*; ⁴Ezek. 27 : 13.

⁵Isa. 24 : 21-23; ⁶Joel 2 : 20.

⁷Joel 3 : 16; ⁸The Mediterranean.

⁹1 Cor. 2 : 9 and 10; 2 Cor. 12 : 1-4.

PART IV

I

SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES

This, the last section of the prophecies of Ezekiel, differs from all that has preceded it. In the ordinary understanding of the term it is not a prophecy, but a specification of a building, followed by certain ritual regulations regarding the services that were to be observed in the building, and certain far-reaching geographical changes that were to take place in the land that had been rescued out of the hands of Gog.

One may see in it the priestly side of Ezekiel. He had probably taken part in the ceremonies associated with the temple that had stood in Jerusalem for some hundreds of years, an experience that had influenced his thoughts and given him a bent toward priestly matters. In such a mind one of the greatest evils of the destruction of the temple was the end of the various sacrifices and ordinances that had been carried out in it. True, he had seen in vision how the building had been defiled by the abominations practised in it. Yet it was the temple where the priests had kept alive, to some extent, the worship of God. Now it was destroyed !

Probably he had heard of the statements made by Jeremiah that the captivity in Babylon was to be for a limited period. What was to happen when the restoration took place ? The temple was in ruins. All the religious associations of Israel, so far as the faithful worshippers of the God of Israel were concerned, were connected in some way with the temple. What was to happen in the promised restoration ?

Thoughts such as these must have occupied the mind of the priest-prophet after the destruction of the

house in which the God of Israel had, in figure, dwelt for so long.

That there was to be a restoration to the land Ezekiel knew. He did not realise the long period that was to elapse, or the great changes in religion that were to take place before the time he had pictured was realized.

2

THE SANCTUARY

(*Ezekiel 40-43*)

The various matters that have been considered in the previous sections of this book have brought readers to this section in which the consummation of Ezekiel's prophecies is reached. The previous predictions have led to the saying with which the prophecy concerning the valley of dry bones, was brought to a conclusion: it was said, "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will bless them and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling-place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."¹ Now, in the chapters to be reviewed, the idea is developed and the sanctuary is described.

The sanctuary is evidently intended to occupy an important place in Israel of the future. The time when particulars of it were communicated to the Prophet is dated from two different events, one, at the beginning of the year, presumably the first month, the tenth day, in

the fourteenth year after the city was conquered, and the twenty-fifth year of the captivity, "on that very day;" it was also fifty years after Josiah re-instituted the Passover. Ezekiel felt the hand of the Lord upon him, and he was brought in the visions of God into the land of Israel. There he saw a structure like a city opposite to him. At the same time he saw a man whose appearance was like bronze (a colour that had been seen in the visions of God in his earlier experiences), with a line of flax and a measuring reed in his hand. Whoever the "man" was, or represented, he was standing in the gateway of the building from which he spoke to Ezekiel: "Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your mind upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you." Ezekiel was then charged to declare all he saw to the house of Israel. A vision thus impressively given to the Prophet was obviously of importance.

At once the description of the building begins. In the context it is stated that each cubit as the unit of measurement was a long one, a cubit and a handbreadth. It means that the reed of six long cubits must have been at least nine feet long. No attempt will be made here to follow all the measurements of the building as given by Ezekiel; to do so would be to take the mind from the building itself and the purpose it is intended to serve, to a mass of detail. The most remarkable measurement is that of the whole building, the "structure like a city;" this is said to have been five hundred reeds round about. Allowing one foot nine inches for the cubit and a handbreadth, this would make the outside measurements something approaching a mile in length. Such a measurement explains why Ezekiel described it as appearing "like a city." If these measurements are checked against

the R.S.V. they will be found to be given there as 500 cubits instead of five hundred reeds. The reason for the difference is that while the Hebrew gives 500 reeds the LXX gives 500 cubits. The general appearance as the structure of a city favours the Hebrew measurements of the outside wall.

Inside the outer wall, on the east, north and south sides there were thirty chambers; there were none on the west as the space was occupied by other buildings, or left blank. These chambers were presumably intended to provide accommodation for the multitudes who visit the sacred precincts. Zechariah, speaking of the future, after the destruction of those who waged war against Jerusalem, said that the survivors of the conflict will go to Jerusalem "to worship the King, the Lord of hosts." These chambers may be intended for the accommodation of these pilgrims, places where they may meet and take part in religious exercises in conformity with whatever regulations may be made. Actually there will be ninety separate rooms, or halls, as in describing similar rooms in the inner court, it is said, "they were in three stories . . . the upper chambers were set back from the ground more than the lower and the middle course."² If this assumption is correct, there will be ninety halls available for whatever purpose may be required. It may, of course, be presumed that they will be used for religious purposes of some kind.

Passing across the outer court, which is to be a hundred cubits wide, a gate opposite will give access to an inner court, in which is situated the Sanctuary itself, a building consisting of three sections, a porch, the Holy place and the Most Holy place. Before these are reached, however, there will be the altar of sacrifice.

This will be there, presumably, to show that, as in the past, sacrifice is the way of approach to the Holy, and the Most Holy, place.

A remarkable feature of the buildings inside the inner court is the fact that "on all the walls round about in the inner room and the nave were carved likenesses of cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Every cherub had two faces; the face of a man toward the palm tree on one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side." The idea suggested was of such importance that on the whole temple round about from the floor to above the door cherubim and palm trees were carved on the wall.³

Two things call for attention in these particulars so definitely expressed; firstly, the number of faces borne by the cherubim, and, secondly, the repeated allusion to palm trees.

In all other allusions to the cherubim where their appearance is described they are represented as having four faces, which have been assumed to refer to certain aspects of the creatures, the man face signifying humanity, the lion face royalty, the ox face service, and the eagle face keenness of sight and speed. It was also pointed out that the fourfold likeness answered to the fourfold presentation of the life of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the fourfold gospel story. Why then are the figures of the cherubim in the temple described by Ezekiel, represented as having only two faces, those representing humanity and royalty?

No authoritative reply can be given to this question, yet we may conclude with some confidence that they are a reminder of the fact that the Messiah who has entered into Ezekiel's prophecies from time to time is fitly represented under these two similitudes. The

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Apostle Paul, speaking of him, wrote; "Being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow."⁴ In that exaltation to which Jesus has attained, he will be the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David," who, by his blood will have ransomed men from every tongue, tribe, and nation.⁵

The palm is a well known sign of victory. Palm branches were strewn in the way of Jesus when he entered into Jerusalem in apparent triumph, while the multitude that rejoices from among all nations proclaiming "Salvation that belongs to God and to the Lamb," had palm branches in their hands.⁶

¹Ezek. 37 : 26-28.

²Ezek. 42 : 6; ³Ezek. 41 : 17-20.

⁴Philippians 2 : 8-10; ⁵Rev. 5 : 6-10; ⁶Ibid. 7 : 10-12.

3

THE GLORY OF GOD ENTERS THE TEMPLE

(*Ezekiel*, 43 : 1-9)

Sufficient has been said to give a general idea of the temple described by Ezekiel in the last section of his prophecies. More might be said, but any who wish to go farther with the mere details of the Sanctuary must seek them elsewhere. All that it is hoped to convey here is the general idea of the buildings and the purposes intended to be served.

THE GLORY OF GOD ENTERS THE TEMPLE

At the end of the general description Ezekiel refers to an event of supreme importance that occurred. In the course of the opening visions, those he described as Visions of God, the scenes he witnessed were depressing, as they culminated in two events. First the cherubim who had been associated with the Visions of God "mounted up." Then the glory of the Lord went from the threshold of the temple that was in Jerusalem and stood over the cherubim, and the whole representation mounted upward. Ezekiel had described some of the unlawful things that were being practised in the temple, and which, added to various other evils, brought upon Judah the evils referred to in later chapters.

In the midst of recounting the evils that were practised in Jerusalem, and the evils that would fall upon the nation because of them, a promise was given. "Thus says the Lord, I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered and I will give you the land of Israel, and when they come there they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them . . . and they shall be my people and I will be their God."¹ Ezekiel then recorded what he saw happening as the result of the evils that had overwhelmed the nation: "Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city," the Mount of Olives.

The departure of the glory of God prepared the way for all the evils that have been recorded in these pages. Now, the evils being cleansed by the conversion of the nation, an opposite movement is described.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Ezekiel beheld the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. He says it was like the vision he had seen when he came, in figure, to destroy the city. Now, as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by way of the gate facing the east, the Spirit transferred him into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The evils that had brought disaster after disaster were things of the past; a new situation had developed, a situation that prepared the way for the announcement that follows: "Son of man, This is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people for ever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their harlotry, and by the dead bodies of their kings, by setting their threshold by my threshold . . . with only a step between me and them." In the past they had done so, in the temple of the future it will not be so for the kings of that age will be immortal. As the living creatures of the Apocalypse they are represented as singing a new song in which they say, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain, and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."²

The section is brought to an end by a further saying: "And you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple and the plan . . . This is the law of the temple, the whole territory round about upon the top of the mountain shall be most holy, Behold, this is the law of the temple."

¹Ezek. 11 : 11-20 ; ²Rev. 5 : 9 and 10.

THE ORDINANCES OF THE TEMPLE

(Ezekiel 43 : 10-26)

The saying referred to in the concluding portion of the foregoing section occupies an important place in Ezekiel's description of the Temple and the ordinances that are to be carried out in connection with it. It calls for careful consideration before an exposition of his sayings can be considered complete. There is an "if" in relation to it that calls for consideration. As the prophet reached the highest point of his description he was instructed to announce what may be regarded as a proviso to sayings as they lead to his announcement of the consummation of the prophecies in this, the final, section of his sayings.

Immediately following his description of the glory of God, God spoke to him, telling him what he was to do. "And you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple and its appearance and plan,"—to which the LXX adds,—"that they may measure the pattern"—"that they may be ashamed of their iniquities. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, portray the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, and its whole form, and make known to them all its ordinances and all its laws; and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe and perform all its laws, and all its ordinances. This is the law of the temple, the whole territory round about the top of the mountain shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple."

In the old days often little respect was paid to the sacred buildings of the temple. They had regarded the

temple as a kind of talisman, a magical protection to them and their city even though they had been completely unfaithful to the obligations it should have imposed upon them by its presence. Members of the royal family of Judah had been buried in land adjacent to the building in which the Shechinah glory had been manifested from time to time. In the temple that Ezekiel was describing to them, "the whole territory round about was to be most holy." It was not to be defiled in any way.

To this provision an important statement was attached, "if they, the children of Israel, are ashamed of all that they have done . . . make known to them all its ordinances and all its laws."

Immediately following this proviso the dimensions of an altar that is to be erected are given. In the instructions concerning it there is an important variation in the terms used to describe it, a variation indicated in the R.S.V. by the two terms "altar" and "altar hearth". The word for "hearth" is different from that usually rendered "altar" which is *mizbeach*. It is *arielyl*, a word that only occurs three times in the Old Testament, while a somewhat similar term, *ariel*, is used in a chapter in Isaiah.¹

The three occurrences of the name *arielyl* are in the passage that reads "the altar hearth shall be square . . . and from the altar hearth upward . . . the altar hearth shall be square" The word "square" has been inserted by the revisers of the R.S.V. to distinguish the unusual occurrence of the alternative word. The inclusion of the word *el* is significant: it is a basic name for God.

Various sacrifices are referred to in the particulars that follow. References occur to sin offerings, burnt offerings, peace offerings and meat offerings. Provision is also made for the Passover to be kept, and for special

offerings to take place in connection with it. The feast of the seventh month, that of the Ingathering is also mentioned.

The provision of such offerings in relation to the temple associated with the future raises important questions. No truth is more definitely insisted on than the lasting efficacy of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. To take one of the Christian epistles only, that to the Hebrews, it is specifically declared that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."² Reference is made to his entering into the Holy place, "taking not the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." Again "Christ entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with the blood not his own . . . but as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." In view of such uncompromising statements, why should the blood of bulls and calves be offered in a temple that is to be the future house of prayer for all mankind? Such a question cannot be regarded as an academic one. It seems to involve a complete contradiction of principles. No specific answer to the question is given, and moderns are left to work the problem out for themselves. What follows is an attempt to provide a solution.

In seeking a reason for the inclusion of actual sacrifices among the ordinances associated with the temple and house of prayer for all peoples, a hint may be found in an institution that is regarded as an essential ordinance in the Christian church. Ever since the

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

sacrifice of Christ, Christians have been accustomed to meet together at intervals, often weekly, to participate in the rite of breaking bread and drinking wine as a memorial of the sacrifice of Calvary. They do so because Jesus said to his disciples, when he partook his last meal with them, "Do this in remembrance of me." The basis of this memorial institution goes back even further in history. In quite early times it was customary when covenants were made for the contracting parties to meet and partake of a meal together as a token of their fellowship; eating together was an integral element of the fact that they had made an agreement. The cases of Jacob and Laban,³ Isaac and Abimelech⁴ and even more striking, Moses and the elders of Israel at Sinai, are illustrations reaching back to comparatively early times. The principle was probably in the mind of Jesus when he said, "This do in remembrance of me." He associated it with the words "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." There was a very good reason why such an institution should have been introduced. The human mind is an inconstant thing; it easily forgets; hence the institution of the ceremony of breaking bread as a constant reminder of Jesus' death on Calvary. It is a constant reminder of the sufferings of Christ as a preliminary to the glories that were to follow.

If the principle is applied to the future there is even more reason why something of the kind should take place. Jesus, the Lamb of God, who was slain to take away the sin of the world, will then be reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will be the One referred to by the prophet Zechariah when he said, "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch; for he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the

Lord and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule upon his throne, while the ends of the earth will be his possession. The matter must be considered from the point of view of those who live in such times. The glory will transcend that of any previous king of any nation, for his Father is the Creator of the Universe. It will be necessary for the peoples of the time to realize the past so that they may remember that Jesus obtained his position by virtue of a period of probation, which included submission to the will of God, a submission manifested after a prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," yet, "nevertheless, let thy will be done."

When the ordinances of the Sanctuary are examined it is seen that, while they resemble some that were associated with the Mosaic ritual, there are differences. In the first place reference is made to inauguration ceremonies. "In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish, and cleanse the Sanctuary. The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the four doorposts of the temple, the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and the posts of the gate of the inner court. You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month for any one who has sinned through error or ignorance; so you shall make atonement for the temple."⁵ Something similar took place in relation to the tabernacle in the wilderness, when atonement was made for the holy place.⁶ At first sight it seems a strange proceeding; why should the Sanctuary need to be cleansed, or to have atonement made for it? The answer surely must be that the materials from which they were constructed partook in some way of the earth, whether they were minerals, or materials of vegetable or animal origin. They were, therefore, to some extent, defiled by associa-

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

tion with sin. In the beginning of the human race the ground had been cursed for man's sake. Everything that was used in the construction of the Sanctuary, therefore, had been subjected to the defiling influence of sin, and needed to be atoned for to make it fit to be incorporated in a building to be "the place of God's feet."

Stranger still, or so it may appear to us, is the reference to the altar. "These are the ordinances of the altar. On the day when it is erected for offering burnt offerings upon it, and for throwing blood against it, you shall give to the Levitical priests of the family of Zadoc, who draw near to me to minister to me, a bull for a sin offering. And you shall take some of its blood and pour it on the four horns of the altar, and on the four corners of the ledge and upon the rim round about; thus you shall cleanse the altar and make atonement for it."⁷ Seven days were to be occupied in making atonement for it, purifying and consecrating it.⁸

In the Mosaic patterns of things in the heavens the altar was a type of Christ, who was holy, harmless, and separate from sinners. What need of cleansing could he have? Yet there was such a need. It is said of him, "The death he died, he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God."⁹ "He who has died is freed from sin."¹⁰ Jesus never sinned, but he came in the likeness of sinful flesh, and he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. These are the things typified by the cleansing of the altar in the Sanctuary.

The sacrifices that are referred to in relation to the altar in the Sanctuary described by Ezekiel are much on the lines of those that had been offered in the temple erected by Solomon: bulls, rams, lambs, goats and kids. They were associated with meat offerings, wheat,

barley, oil and drink offerings. The similarity though with some differences suggests that, whilst the ordinances that applied to the Mosaic arrangements pointed forward, those of the Ezekiel temple will point backward.

There are differences between the two rituals and ordinances. There are, for instance, morning offerings, but no mention is made of the corresponding evening sacrifice. Of the fasts and feasts only the Passover and the feast of Tabernacles are mentioned, there is no allusion to the feast of weeks. One striking omission is the day of Atonement. The omission of this, the most solemn of all the days in the old Mosaic legislation, is somewhat surprising. It may be due to the difference between the old and the new Israel. In the past Israel was described as a stiff-necked people, constantly rebellious against the ordinances of God. In the future it is said, "Your people shall all be righteous."¹¹ That does not mean that there will be no sin, otherwise there would be no provision for sin offerings. Sin, however, will be restrained, hence, perhaps the reason for the omission of any reference to the day of Atonement.

The same reason may account for the absence of specific directions about personal and private sacrifices. The burnt offerings and sacrifices that are mentioned are to be provided by the Prince out of the oblation offerings of the people; the people appear to be spectators of, not participators in them. All this accords with the suggestion that the sacrifices offered in the Sanctuary will be of a commemorative character, pointing back to the one sacrifice for sins for ever offered by the Lamb of God.

In the comparison between the temple of the past and that referred to by Ezekiel one of the most surprising differences is that there is no reference to the ark. In the

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

temple of Solomon the ark bore the mercy-seat and the figures of the cherubim. Why should it be omitted from the temple described by Ezekiel? It is parallel to the omission of the day of Atonement from the sacred festivals and fasts. One of the ceremonies that took place on the day of Atonement was the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy-seat. The absence of the ark accords with the omission of the day of Atonement, and is no doubt due to the same reason.

There may be another reason for the absence of the ark. In the past it was a place for the manifestation of the presence of God from time to time. In the Sanctuary of the Future Age such a representation will not be required. Jesus said on one occasion, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." In the future he will "reign for God and dwell with men." A material representation of God will be unnecessary.

Among the provisions made for the guidance of the people and incorporated in the particulars concerning the Sanctuary and its ordinances, is a direction concerning weights and measures. It seems out of place in what is, otherwise, a guide to the performance of religious duties. It is introduced by the saying, "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath," and goes on to define standard measures and values. Of course, to some extent these provisions may be necessary to define weights, measures, and values in relation to sacrifices and so forth. It seems obvious, however, that there is also something to indicate the conduct of the people in relation to one another. Honest and faithful dealing cannot be separated from the religious element in human life. The fixing of values and the standardization of weights and measures links religious and mercantile

transactions together, and indicates that two cannot be separated into what may be regarded as watertight compartments.

¹Isa. 29 : 2; ²Heb. 5 : 8 and 9, Heb. 9 : 25 and 26; ³Gen. 31 : 46; ⁴Gen. 26 : 28-30; ⁵Ezek. 45 : 18-20; ⁶Lev. 16 : 16; ⁷Ezek. 43 : 18-20; ⁸Ezek. 43 : 26; ⁹Rom. 6 : 10; ¹⁰Heb. 9 : 26; ¹¹Isa. 60 : 21.

5

THE PRINCE AND HIS ASSOCIATES

(*Ezekiel, Chapter 44*)

The most important personage referred to in the chapters of Ezekiel dealing with matters concerning the Sanctuary is the Prince. The title is almost anonymous, as nothing is said about him that specifically indicates who he is and why he is uniformly described by that title. Yet he occupies so important a position in the last nine chapters of the Prophet's writings that he must be a person of supreme importance. Who, and what is he?

The first allusion to him in the chapters devoted to the Sanctuary and its ordinances is of such importance that it will be well to set it out at length. "Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the Sanctuary that faces east; and it was shut. And he said to me, 'This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. Only the Prince may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go

out by the same way."¹ From these words it is obvious that the Prince occupies a unique position in relation to the Sanctuary, and possesses privileges that are confined to himself. It will be remembered that it was by way of the eastern gate that the glory of the Lord entered the temple when the "glory of the Lord returned to it with a sound like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory."² With such a privilege accorded to him it is evident that the Prince occupies the supreme position at the time when the new Sanctuary is established as a house of prayer for all the peoples of the earth.

In earlier chapters of Ezekiel the term is applied to the reigning king of Israel. It occurred, for example, on the occasion when Ezekiel acted the part of an emigrant, and it was said, "This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem"—the prince being the king. It occurred also in the reference to King Zedekiah when the words were used, "O unhallowed wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment."³ On the latter of these two occasions it was further said, "There shall not be even a trace of it until he comes whose right it is; and to him I will give it."³ He whose right it is, is unquestionably Jesus the Christ, the son of David, "Great David's greater son," of whom it was said by the angel who spoke to Mary of Nazareth, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David."⁴ It is obvious, therefore, that the Prince of Ezekiel's prophecy is the same—Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah. When the use of the term in previous chapters is examined it will be realized that this is the only conclusion that can be drawn. When the Prophet referred to the One Shepherd who is to be set up over

the house of Israel, he, speaking for God, said "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken."⁵ In the visions of dry bones and the united sticks, the same idea is expressed, "My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd." In all of these quotations the application is the same; Israel's Messiah is referred to—God's beloved Son. David means beloved, and he it is whose right it will be to occupy the supreme position when the Sanctuary is built. The last allusion to the Prince occurs in the chapter in which the new name of the city is recorded, Yahweh-Shammah,

Reverting to the passage that declares the Prince to have the exclusive right to sit in the eastern gate, the conclusion is still further emphasized. The glory of the God of Israel entered by it, no man is to enter by it, but it is said the Prince shall go in and out by it, and sit in it. He must, therefore, be something more than mere man. If it is recognized that the Prince is the Messiah all is explained, for he was the word which became flesh, who had glory as of the only Son from the Father.⁶

Before leaving the consideration of sayings concerning the Prince it may be well to look at certain difficulties that may arise. They concern mainly (a) the fact that he offers sacrifices, (b) that he gives gifts to his "sons," and (c) he is subject to certain prohibitions that seem to be inconsistent with the Prince being the Messiah. They may be considered very briefly.

(a) The sacrifices are said to be prepared for the Prince and for all the people of the land on special occasions such as the Passover. They are not for himself

in the sense of being for sins, they are offerings for the people, just as in the past the priest offered offerings for the nation of Israel that were not personal. So in the future, when such sacrifices are offered they are for the people generally. The Prince, in effect, associates himself with the people.

(b) Gifts to his sons, or his children. The "children" mentioned are such on the principle illustrated in the case of Isaiah who refers to the children whom the Lord had given him, a saying repeated by the writer to the Hebrews, who said, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying . . . Here am I, and the children God has given me."⁷ It is the basis upon which the sacrifice of Christ was efficacious to deliver those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

(c) In this case it is simply the expression of the principle by which the Prince will abide. The words may be regarded as prophetic rather than mandatory.

With regard to the principle governing sacrifices it should be remembered that as one who became a partaker of flesh and blood, the Prince was tempted as we are, yet without sinning,⁸ who "in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard for his godly fear,"⁹ yet he "has no need, like other high priests to offer sacrifices daily . . . he did this once for all when he offered up himself,"¹⁰ through his own blood obtaining eternal redemption. From such sayings as these it will be seen that although he did no sin, the Prince may associate himself with his people when he participates in their sacrificial offerings.

¹Ezek. 44 : 1-3; ²Ezek. 43 : 2; ³Ezek. 21 : 25-27; ⁴Luke 1 : 32; ⁵Ezek. 34 : 23 and 24; ⁶John 1 : 14; ⁷Heb. 2 : 11 and 14; ⁸Heb. 4 : 15; ⁹Heb. 5 : 7; ¹⁰Heb. 7 : 27.

PRIESTHOOD IN THE AGE TO COME

(Ezekiel 44 : 9-31)

In the temple of Jerusalem in the days of Ezekiel two principal orders of men were responsible for the duties performed in connection with the ordinances carried out within its precincts—the priests and the Levites. There were certain other subordinate orders, but they were associated with the more menial duties. In the days of Ezekiel both orders had fallen from the high positions they occupied in the original temple in the days of Solomon. This was one of the reasons why the temple, and the city, had been destroyed. Pagan rites had been allowed to be performed within the temple, whilst ordinances in accordance with the Mosaic legislation had been allowed to sink into lesser importance.

In the past the supreme official in the temple had been the High Priest. In the enumeration of the services to be performed in the Ezekiel temple there is no mention of this office; only priests and Levites are referred to. The supreme personage in all arrangements in it is the Prince, indeed in all that is said about the arrangements for the future, whether in relation to the Sanctuary, or in general, he is supreme. In connection with the Sanctuary it is his duty to furnish the burnt offerings, cereal offerings, and drink offerings at the feasts, the new moons and on the Sabbaths, “all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall provide the sin offerings, cereal offerings, burnt offerings and peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.”¹

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

In the general provisions for sacrifice the two classes associated with the temple services are the Levitical priests, and the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of God's sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from God. The latter shall come near to Him to minister and attend God to offer the fat and the blood; they shall enter the sanctuary and they shall approach the table and they shall keep God's charge.² Who were the Zadokite priests who went not astray, but kept the charge of God's sanctuary in a time of unfaithfulness on the part of the Levites? On certain occasions in the history of Judah, reference is made to them. The Zadok line of the priesthood was selected as that from which the high priests of Israel were to be provided when Abiathar, of the old line was deposed by Solomon because he supported Adonijah in his attempt to seize the throne at the end of David's reign. Members of the line showed themselves to be loyal at certain times of crisis later, when kings were said to be unfaithful. Jehoiada, for example, was the promoter of a movement that effected the death of Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, after she seized the throne of Judah.³ In the reign of Josiah, too, the High Priest, Hilkiah found the book of the law in the Temple and took part in the reformation promoted by the king.⁴ The priest, Urijah was evidently a loyal supporter of the prophet Isaiah in the reign of Ahaz of Judah, one of the worst of the kings who ruled in Judah. Of their conduct as a whole we know little, so that it is impossible to be sure of the individuals Ezekiel had in mind when he spoke of the "Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok," nor would it give any definite idea who they were in relation to a Sanctuary that was to be erected thousands of years later than the Zadok mentioned. It is, therefore, wiser to accept the account as he wrote it,

and wait until the future shall make things clear.

It does not help to a solution of the problem to remind readers that the cherubim in Ezekiel, and the living ones and elders of the Apocalypse, represent those who can say, "Thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."⁵ There will be immortal priests in the Age to come, but, presumably those who attend to offer fat and blood to God will be taken from the mortal populations of the future age, as it is provided that they are to wear certain specified clothing, "they shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat." Laws too are enacted to govern the marriages of priests. They must not go near a dead person, unless the dead individual be a near kinsman, or kinswoman. Moreover, if a priest contracts defilement he will remain in that defilement for seven days, and when he goes into the holy place he must offer a sin offering for himself.⁶

¹Ezek. 45 : 17; ²Ezek. 44 : 15 and 16.

³2 Kings, chapters 11 and 12; ⁴2 Kings 22, etc.; ⁵Rev. 5 : 9 and 10;

⁶Ezek. 44 : 15-27.

CHANGES IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

(Ezekiel, Chapters 47 and 48)

One of the most remarkable features of the Sanctuary is a stream or river that is to issue from under the threshold of the building, and, without any apparent tributaries, becomes later one which can only be crossed by swimming. No explanation is given to account for this phenomenon. Ezekiel was taken by the man with a line of flax who had showed him the various buildings of the Sanctuary. He was led to the door of the temple within the inner court where he saw water issuing from below the threshold toward the east. (The Hebrew at this point is said to be somewhat obscure). The water flowed eastward and by the time Ezekiel and his guide had traversed a thousand cubits, the water was ankle deep. A thousand cubits further it was knee-deep. So it went on until it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. At this point Ezekiel's guide spoke, saying, "Son of man, have you seen this?" The question implies that there was something strange about the whole matter. That that was so is evident, a river that increased in volume with no apparent reason for the increased quantity was certainly strange.

As Ezekiel and his guide retraced their steps, Ezekiel noticed that many trees grew on either side of the stream, a phenomenon which will be commented on later. Meanwhile the guide told Ezekiel something about the stream that became a river, describing its purpose. His words were, "This water flows toward the eastern region, and goes down into the Arabah; and

when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea they will become fresh." The Arabah is the name given to the low lying lands at the south end of the Jordan valley. The name indicates a desert steppe area such as exists at the junction of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. A map showing the physical features of the neighbourhood will show that waters emanating from Jerusalem flowing in an easterly direction would naturally reach the northern end of the Dead Sea. Writing of a stream which follows this course it is said, "It plunges down among the bare terraces, precipices and crags of the wilderness of Judea, —the wilderness of The Scapegoat. So barren and blistered, and so furnacelike does it become as it drops below the level of the sea, (i.e. the Mediterranean), that it takes the name of Wady-en-Nar, or the Fire Wady. At last its dreary course brings it to the precipices above the Dead Sea into which it shoots its scanty winter waters, but all the summer it is dry."¹ The course of the waters described by Ezekiel forms a happy parable of the influence that will flow from the waters that issue from the Sanctuary. The same writer gives expression to this in the following words: "So there is nothing—nothing too sunken, too useless, too doomed—but by the grace of God it may be redeemed, lifted and made rich with life."² The words are a happy comment and lesson that may be learned from the waters that are to issue from under the Sanctuary, making the waters of the Dead Sea productive. "Wherever the river goes every living creature which swims will live, and there will be very many fish." Fishers will find plenty of encouragement to ply their craft, for the fish will be as varied as those of the Mediterranean Sea.

There was something special about the trees that grew on the banks of the river. "On the banks, on both

sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the Sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." The whole conception of these trees, with their leaves and fruit, may be placed beside the sayings of Isaiah, "the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of our God."³ Waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sands shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

All through human history the lands to the east of Jerusalem, until the Jordan valley is reached, have been wilderness. Nothing could appeal more to minds acquainted with the area than the luxuriant pictures presented by the change suggested by Ezekiel. An extreme picture of such changes is that given in the Apocalypse, where the following words occur: "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb . . . On either side of the river the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."⁴

The other geographical changes that are to result from the waters that flow from the Sanctuary need not be discussed here. The pouring of water into the saline waters of the Dead Sea must cause other changes, changes in the level of its waters and so forth. They must remain for individual consideration.

CHANGES IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

These changes are not the only ones; others referred to are more of a political character. New boundaries of the land are fixed. Instead of the boundaries of the possessions of the various tribes being fixed, to some extent, by geographical considerations, the land is to be divided into equal portions. The northern and southern boundaries being determined, and an allowance made for a special holy portion, the land is to be divided into twelve equal portions, subject to the eastern and western boundaries, particularly the latter which depends on the sea coast. The northern border extends further north than the old boundary. Measured from the Mediterranean, at a point not named, it is defined as going by way of Hethlon to the entrance of Hamath, and on to Zedad, Berothah, Sibraim as far as Hazerhatticon, which is on the border of Hauran. Some of these places are not known, so that the actual line cannot be fixed. In the south the line is described as from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, thence along the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean. Here again the site of some of the places is unknown.

Allowing for the uncertainty of some of the places named, the land is assigned to the tribes in the order of Dan, Asher, Naphthali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Judah. Then a portion is referred to as the Prince's portion, in which the Sanctuary is to be placed, together with the priests' domain, the land of the Levites, and the city and its suburbs.

South of this portion the land is assigned to the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulon, and Gad.

Special provisions are made in connection with the Prince's portion. The city will have three gates on each of its four sides, each being assigned to three tribes.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Detailed directions and provisions are laid down in connection with the future of the land and of the city. They need not be repeated here as they can be studied from the text. The one great thing that remains is that the name of the city will express the great truth enshrined in the closing words of Ezekiel—the name of the city thenceforth will be YAHWEH SHAMMAH; The Lord is there !

¹SMITH, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, page 511; ²Ibid, page 512; ³Isa. 35 : 1 and 2; ⁴Rev. 22 : 1 and 2.

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