

I Did As I Was Commanded

"Son of Man, the place of My Throne, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel FOR EVER. And My Holy Name shall the house of Israel no more defile"—Ezek. 43:7

EZEKIEL: SON OF MAN

EZEKIEL (*God Strengthens*) was one of the 3 great pillars who carried the purpose of God through the terrible epoch of the destruction of God's Kingdom, and the beginning of the dark Gentile night of Nebuchadnezzar's Image that has lasted 2500 years, and is only now coming to an end.

Ezekiel's name occurs just twice in the whole Bible, both in his own book (chs. 1 & 24). He is addressed by God 92 times as 'Son of Man', a few more times than this term is applied to Christ himself. Ezekiel clearly was a man of sign. Neither Ezekiel nor his book are mentioned in the New Testament, but Revelation is obviously linked to his prophecies in very many aspects.

When he began his ministry to and among the captives in Babylon, Jeremiah had already been prophesying at Jerusalem for over 30 years, and Daniel had been prominent for 7 or 8 years at the court of Babylon. Ezekiel & Jeremiah were priestly prophets; Daniel was of the royal line of David.

Ezekiel was carried captive to Babylon at the same time as king Jehoiachin. This is usually dated 597 BC*. Daniel had been carried captive about 9 years earlier in 606 BC—the first deportation, from which the basic 70 years captivity dates, to Cyrus' proclamation in 536 BC.

Each of these 3 men had a vital function to perform: Jeremiah in the land, Ezekiel with the captives in Babylon#, & Daniel in the Babylonian court & government. All was clearly under God's control, though it looked to the natural man like the total collapse of God's power & purpose. Certainly with Daniel in favour & authority the Jews would be well treated. And even more importantly, we see in both Daniel's & Ezekiel's books the controlling *angelic* hand openly revealed.

We are told the captives with Ezekiel were the better part of the nation: the 'good figs'—Jer. 24, as contrasted with those left behind in the land. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel—in a dark day of destruction & scattering—revealed the divine explanation of why it was all happening, and foretold for Israel a final day of regathering & righteousness & glorious worship, the centre of a purified earth in prosperity and at rest.

Ezekiel was of the priesthood—1:3, & it appears to have been his mission to be the centre of divine approach & intercession for the exiles. God said through him—11:16 that He (God) would be a 'little sanctuary'—or Holy Place—to them in their captivity. It is very fitting, therefore, that Ezekiel was the one to reveal the pattern of the great House of Prayer for All Nations hinted at by several of the prophets.

Ezekiel's prophecies are all dated, and the whole book is in strict chronological order, except in one group for the obvious purpose of association+. Ezekiel's recorded prophecies were made over a period of 22 years (5th to 27th of his captivity). That is, from 6 years before till 16 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. His prophecies are all dated from the year Jehoiachin (& Ezekiel) was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. This is the great dividing line.

* Dates are not exact. 'Authorities' differ. Man's dating & knowledge of the period is confused

Apparently about 200 miles north of the city of Babylon.

+ Chs. 26-28 (about Tyre) are in the 11th year of the captivity (26:1); chs. 29-32 (on Egypt) are in 10th (29:1), 27th (29:17), 11th (30:20, 31:1), & 12th (32:1), obviously grouped by subject.

His book contains 48 chapters. It pivots around one central event—the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem. This comes in ch. 24 and divides the book exactly in half. Everything before that point is denunciation and condemnation for the wickedness and abominations that made the

destruction of the Kingdom inevitable—*the glory removed*. Everything after that point is consolation and promise—*the glory returned*.

The last half is subdivided again: 8 chapters of judgment on Israel's enemies; 16 chapters of promise concerning Israel's reestablishment. These figures are all too regular and significant to be chance: 48 is 12 4s. The last 16 chapters for Israel are subdivided 7 & 9: 7 (33-39) the latter days; 9 (40-48) the glorious House of Prayer.

Chs. 1-24 (of judgment) were before the siege of Jerusalem; 25-33 (against Gentiles) at time of the siege; 34-48 (of comfort) after the siege. The great dividing point at ch. 24 is also marked by a great personal tragedy for Ezekiel: a staggering trial of affection & faith, in which—as 'Son of Man—he faithfully symbolizes both God & the nation.

PROPHECIES IN 5th YEAR OF CAPTIVITY—592 BC—CHAPTERS 1-7

Ch. 1: Ezekiel's mission opens in the fifth year of his captivity with the vision of the Cherubim and glory of God: the most spectacular & detailed revelation of divine manifestation in all Scripture. Nothing approaches it for splendour except the closing chs. of Revelation: the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's Bride, and the dwelling of God with man—to all of which it is closely related. It is a picture of the New Creation of Deity, and thus counterbalances Gen. 1, and parallels the first chs. of John's Gospel and First Epistle.

It was fitting and merciful that such a picture should be revealed at such a time. Though perhaps little understood, to the faithful it would be an assurance that the glory, tho departing, was not forgetful of the true seed of Abraham. The 4-fold Cherubim of Glory—the Living Creature—is a pictorial representation of the Redeemed of God in their glorified state: resplendent in divine power and wisdom, and vibrant with ceaseless activity and joy. This is the Yahweh-Elohim manifestation: *He Who Shall Be Mighty Ones*. This vision also closely parallels Rev. 1—John's Son of Man, Multitudinous Christ, symbol.

Ch. 2: In the midst of the vision, Ezekiel is addressed. He is called to his mission, and warned that he will be among briars, thorns, and scorpions. Clearly the 'good figs' were a small minority, even of those carried away, but there would always be a faithful few.

Ch. 3: He was told from the beginning Israel would not hear. Like Jeremiah, his mission was doomed to failure before it began. And yet, in a larger sense, it was a complete and eternal success, as shall all the works be of those who work with God. None can ever fail who by faith and wisdom, drop everything in this life, & give all their efforts to making themselves part of the Cherubim of Glory. *It demands full time*.

A short time before Ezekiel's ministry began, Jeremiah had written to the exiles—Jer. 29 telling them the captivity would be 70 years long, & to settle constructively in Babylon, and not believe the false prophets promising an early return. This laid the foundation for Ezekiel's work.

Doubtless he would describe the vision of the Cherubim to those who had ears to hear, for he was a prophet to them, and its purpose was comfort and encouragement. But his first specific message was—

Ch. 4: The enacted parable of the siege. He is to draw the city of Jerusalem on a tile, & lay siege to it. Then he is to lay bound on his left side 390 days, and on his right side 40 days. These, he is told, are the years of the iniquity of Israel and Judah.

The 390 clearly refers back to the years since the division of the Kingdom at the beginning of Rehoboam's reign. The 40 appears to be the previous period, from the 4th of Solomon, when the Temple was begun, to the 4th of Rehoboam, when Judah turned aside from God, or perhaps it was the whole of Solomon's reign. The general application is clear: 390 + 40 years of wickedness to be atoned for by desolation.

Now Jeremiah says the captivity should be for 70 years; & Lev. 26:43 says the land shall 'enjoy her sabbaths' while she lieth desolate. It is a remarkable fact that *the sabbath years in 430 years come to exactly 70*. It is all the more remarkable because it means adding 2 irregular fractions. One year in 7 were to be sabbaths of rest for the land—Lev. 25:4, plus 1 year in every 50, the jubilee—Lev. 25:11.

One-seventh of 430 = 61.4; 1/50 of 430 = 8.6: 61.4 + 8.6 = 70 years.

And carrying the 430 *forward* from the carrying-away period, 606-586 BC, comes just to the period of re- establishing of independence under the Maccabees, 176-156 BC. In fact, year of the Maccabean revolt (168 BC) was just 430 years from the year of Ezekiel's captivity (597 BC): the year he dates everything in his book by.

Ch.5: Another enacted parable of judgment. Ezekiel is to shave off his hair & beard with a *sword* (RV is clearer: AV has 'razor'). It would be *all* his hair and beard, to fit the symbol, and it would be a matter of personal shame and embarrassment (& doubtless ridicule) to Ezekiel, just as Isaiah's going 'naked & barefoot'—20:2 would be. They typified the nation's shame and degradation. Shaving the head was a sign of mourning—Deut. 21:12; Job 1:20; Isa. 15:2 etc, but it also implied a process of cleansing from defilement—Lev. 14:8.

The hair represents the people of Jerusalem: its living glory & ornament. 1/3 he burns: those who died by famine and pestilence in the city in the siege. 1/3 he smites with the sword: those killed in the taking of the city. 1/3 he scatters to the winds: those who survived & were driven away captive. A few of these last he puts in a fold in his garment, for protection & preservation: those assembled under Gedaliah. But these are taken out again and burned, for Gedaliah was slain and the survivors killed and scattered.

Ch.6: The mountains of Israel shall be desolate. Between this prophecy and that of ch.36—the repopulation of these same mountains—is 25 centuries of weary retribution because Israel was unfaithful.

Ch. 7: *The end is come!* God would bring the worst of the heathen upon them, because of their disobedience and worldliness.

PROPHECIES IN THE 6th YEAR OF CAPTIVITY—591 BC—CHS 8-19

In chs. 8-11 Ezekiel is taken in vision to the Temple at Jerusalem.

Ch.8: The vile abominations & corruptions that have taken the place of the true, appointed worship of God. This vision is dated just 3 yrs. before Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of the city. These are the conditions that make its destruction inevitable.

Ch.9: The destruction of Jerusalem symbolically begins: 6 men with slaughter-weapons come from the north. Six is the number of man. There were 6 generals of the Babylonian army—Jer. 39:3. Ezekiel's 6 men were God's supervising angels, and their slaughter-weapons were the Babylonian generals and their armies.

The 6 are directed by a 7th man in linen with an inkhorn, who puts a mark on all in the city who mourn for the abominations being committed. Then the 6 are directed to slay all the rest.

We cannot take from this the absolute guarantee that everyone who died in this siege was wicked, and everyone who lived was righteous, for the record shows differently. But it does comfortingly manifest God's complete control and supervision of every detail. God watches and marks everyone. There are no mistakes; no oversights. All sin will be punished: all righteousness at last rewarded.

Ch.10: In the midst of the judgment, the glorious Cherubim—the Redeemed—of ch. 1 appear again. This may seem out of place, but it is not. The Cherubim are the end-product of all God's works. As a purpose and a conception, they are *always* present: always in the background. *All things are for their sakes*—2 Cor.4:15. Their presence gives purpose & meaning, and even hope, to these terrible times, assuring that all is working together for eventual, eternal good for those who love and serve God—the Cherubim of Glory being prepared.

In 9:3, the Shekinah-Glory of God's presence begins to leave the doomed Temple. In 10:18 it departs further, completely leaving the Temple and going to the Cherubim. The Cherubim are the eternal *reality* of the divine purpose. The Mosaic Temple was but a *temporary* manifestation of that reality. The Cherubim were originally in the Tabernacle and the Temple because God's purpose was for the time being centred in those buildings. But because of the continual accumulation of wickedness, the Glory was being taken away.

And it did not return, even when Israel returned, & the nation was re-established, and the Temple rebuilt. The Law continued another 600 years, but it was an empty form. The living heart was gone. There was no Priest with Urim & Thummim. It was just a marking time till Christ should come. We shall see this aspect again in ch. 21.

Ch.11: Further abominations revealed, and further judgments, but there is promise—17:20 of eventual regathering and purification. Then—21 the Glory completely departs—and the vision ends.

Ch.12: The carrying away enacted, and the attempt of Zedekiah to flee in the night from the victorious Babylonians. But he should be caught, & taken in chains to Babylon: but still he should not see Babylon. We know the terrible way that puzzle was solved.

Ch.13 is against the false prophets and lying diviners. 'Peace!'—and there is no peace. The tottery wall whitewashed to make it look strong.

Ch.14: The elders come to Ezekiel, pretending to seek God, but not with a complete heart for Him alone, which He demands. They served Him superficially, but they had idols of self-will in their hearts, to do with their time and wealth as *they* wished. Noah, Daniel and Job together—men of outstanding righteousness—couldn't save the land now.

Ch.15: The barren, leafy, self-luxuriating Vine. Nothing is more useless. Ordinary trees are at least good for wood & construction if they have no fruit, but a fruitless vine is good for nothing but a brief fire.

So with God's people. They do not help the world's work. They are called to be separate from that. They are God's Vine, designed only for spiritual fruit. They are useless for the world's ordinary building. If they do not fulfil their *one* purpose—fruit to God and light to the world—they are parasites: of less value to God than the people of the world.

Ch.16: A long, detailed allegory portraying Israel as a cast-off, abandoned baby girl, whom God rescued & nourished, and showered love upon, and raised to adulthood, and at last made His wife.

But she turned from all His love and kindness, to friendship & corruption with the world and His enemies, in spite of all His patience & entreaties, and repeated forgivenesses. But still at last, after long and bitter separation and tribulation, He will receive her back to Him.

How little did the Jews of Jerusalem realize that within 3 years, all that seemed so permanent would be destroyed, and they would have begun their long dark centuries of endless, restless wandering.

Ch.17: The riddle of the foreign eagles and the Israel cedar. The top twig Jehoiachin plucked off, and carried off by the Babylon-eagle; & Zedekiah set up in his place. The warning is against Zedekiah's treachery & folly in rebelling against Babylon & plotting with the Egypt-eagle.

Then again the bright ray at the end: using the same figure of tree and twig, the glorious Kingdom of Christ is promised. Even in their direst portends, the prophets never go far without promise of blessing.

Ch.18 deals with divine principles of justice. Israel complained they were being punished for their fathers' sins, and they could quote certain statements of God Himself that *seemed* to support them, as that He was destroying Jerusalem because of the blood that Manasseh had shed 50 years before—2 Kings 24:3; and that He would 'visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the 3rd & 4th generations'—Exodus 20:5.

The answer is 2-fold. First, the nation was being judged *as a nation* because it *continued* such sins as Manasseh's. A nation is like an individual. If it continues to sin, it is finally punished for all its *past* sins. If it repents, those past sins will be forgotten. Similarly, the rest of the quotation about the 'sins of the fathers' changes it from injustice to mercy and patience: it is the '3rd and 4th generation of *them that hate Me* that at last receives God's deferred wrath.

Second, *national* judgments were one thing, and the just suffered in them like the unjust. But in the ultimate eternal judgment—which is the only one that really matters—each individual stands alone, & is rewarded or punished according to his own record.

A righteous Jeremiah or Ezekiel may necessarily suffer in the general calamities with the wicked nation he ministered to, but that was just a passing aspect of the development & training for God's eternal glory. We 'must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom'—Acts 14:22, and that tribulation will be doubly welcomed, & accepted with joyful patience, if it is incurred in ministering to God's people.

Ch.19: The Judah-lioness and her cubs. A lamentation for Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, Judah's last 2 home-appointed rulers, trapped & carried away. A warning to then-reigning Zedekiah, Babylon's appointee.

PROPHECIES IN 7th YEAR OF CAPTIVITY—590 BC—CHS. 20-23

Ch.20 catalogues Israel's long, continuous history of disobedience, right from the beginning; leading at last to this casting off of the Kingdom. In Jerusalem, Jeremiah was saying the same to them—

"The children of Israel and Judah have only done evil before Me from their youth . . . This city hath been to Me as a provocation of Mine anger & fury from the day they built it even unto this day" (Jer. 32:30-31).

Ezekiel—Ch. 37 vs. 33-38 adds important details of the final regathering we don't get elsewhere. God will gather the Jews out of the nations, but *no rebels shall enter the land*. Somewhere in between they are assembled & the wicked are purged out. Probably but a small remnant will actually reach the land. The purging process could take many years.

Chs. 21-23 are the final culminating indictment of wicked Israel, in 7 distinct sections, each beginning 'And the word of the Lord came unto me.' The terrible sword of the Lord has been drawn, and it cannot be re-sheathed. It must now do its work relentlessly unto the end. As God said at the same time to Jeremiah: '*Pray not for this people.*'

Ch. 21: The king of Babylon stands at the crossroads, casting lots on whom he should attack, and the lot fell on Jerusalem. Then follow those well-known words of doom to both Zedekiah & the nation (v.25):

"Profane wicked prince... whose day is come when iniquity shall have an end!"

'Crown' of v. 26 is the royal crown, but 'diadem' is the word used *only and always* for the High Priest's mitre. Christ is the Heir of both the throne & the high-priesthood. Both are now suspended till he comes.

This is important. There was a restoration under Cyrus, but it was just an empty shell, like the Ark-less Tabernacle in the days of Saul. God was with them in a degree, & required the Temple to be rebuilt, as we see from the prophecies of Haggai in the days of Zerubbabel.

But it was never again the same. The Shekinah-glory never returned to the golden cherubim above the Mercy-seat. There never arose a High Priest with Urim & Thummim. The 'tabernacle of David' remained fallen; though the nation must continue as such in some form till the true Heir to both crown & mitre should come & be presented to them.

These verses are another interesting link in the chain of evidence showing Christ to be the Heir of both the Kingship & the Priesthood.

Ch.22: 'Judge the bloody city!'—priests, princes, prophets and people all alike in wickedness and abominations.

Ch.23: The climax of condemnation. The 2 lewd women: Aholah (Israel) and Aholibah (Judah). 'Aholah' means *Her Own Tabernacle*. That was 10-tribed Israel & their man-made worship. 'Aholibah' means *My Tabernacle Is in Her*: Judah, supposed seat of true divine worship.

The whole chapter is the presentation of their relationships with the world under the vivid and striking figure of sexual corruption & abomination. This is how God views any mixture of His holy separated people with the dead and corrupt world that knows Him not. It is the same vital lesson that James emphasizes in the same bold figure—

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses: know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (4:4).

Friendship with the world is so easy and so seemingly pleasant and harmless, but let us never forget that it is not so to God. In His sight, 'The whole world lieth in wickedness'—1 John 5:19, & any relationship with it and its institutions that is not necessary & in the service of God is utter abomination in His sight.

Let us ever bear Ezek. 23 in mind. We, if we really *are* God's people, are the only *living* (it is a very high calling), & all the rest of the world are *dead*—all outside the covenant-relationship, no matter how close to us in the flesh. And contact is defiling, unless it be contact whose motive, like Christ, is to give the leper cleansing—Matt. 8:3 & the dead life—Luke 7:14.

Ch.24: *We now have reached the end.* The chapter begins—

"In the 9th year, 10th month, 10th day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: Son of Man, write thee the name of the day, even of *this same day*. The king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem **THIS SAME DAY.**"

The final siege had begun. In the parable of vs. 3-14, the city is the caldron, the people are the flesh in it, and the roaring fire shall burn, not only till the contents are destroyed, but till the caldron itself is utterly melted and disappears, for there is no other way to cleanse its corruption. *What God cannot cleanse, He must destroy.*

And now, simply to enforce the lesson on wicked Israel, a terrible thing happens to Ezekiel. God suddenly—& without warning, without any time for preparation or farewells—tells him—v.16 that his wife, the desire of his eyes, his most precious treasure, will die *that day*.

And all that day while he is expecting it, and all the next day after it has happened, he must not pause in his duties, but go right ahead with his work for God, & give absolutely *no sign of grief or mourning*.

And he simply says, 'I did as I was commanded.' Was ever man more bitterly tried? It is one of those things which natural man finds so hard to understand of the ways of God, for *His* thoughts are so much higher than man's. God's thoughts are on eternal good. Man's are so limited to the passing present.

Both Ezekiel's mortal life & his wife's were at best but brief flashes in the broad sweep of history. Parting must come, sooner or later, in the deepest and sweetest of human relationships. But if they are for God's Kingdom, then the brief separation is nothing: just a merciful taking away from the evil to come:

"He giveth His beloved sleep" (Psa.127).

If they are *not* for God's Kingdom, then their present life is utterly meaningless & purposeless anyway, like the passing buzz of an insect.

"At even my wife died: and I did in the morning as I was commanded."

Obedience: that is all that mattered, or had any meaning & purpose.

The lesson was to shock and awake wicked Israel, and we can only hope some were saved by it. God would take away everything they considered precious and worthwhile, & they would be in such misery and distress that they would be unable to mourn or weep. How often has that been repeated in their long sad history!

They asked what it all meant—& he explained it to them. Then his mouth was closed, and his testimony to them was cut off—completely silenced for 3 years, all through the siege and beyond, until the news of the city's destruction reached them in Babylon.

So ends the first half of the book.

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The next 8 chapters (25-32) are prophecies of punishments on Israel's enemies. Seven peoples are mentioned, but 5 of them just briefly: Ammon, Moab, Edom & Philistia in ch. 25; Sidon a few vs. in ch. 28. The bulk of the 8 chs. concerns only 2: Tyre & Egypt: 3 chs. for Tyre (26-28), and 4 for Egypt (29-32).

PROPHECIES (against Tyre) IN 11th YEAR OF CAPTIVITY—586 BC—CHS. 26-28

Ch.26: Because Tyre rejoiced against Jerusalem, she should be levelled to the ground, & scraped clean, like the top of a rock (*Tyre* = 'Rock'). Tyre was on an island stronghold, boasting in her insular security, as Britain did for many centuries.

Ch.27: A detailed and interesting catalogue of the goods wherein she traded with all the earth, accurately naming and identifying the products of many geographical localities: all sound fact and history. But, like modern Babylon—papal Rome—all was to be cast into the sea.

Why so much about Tyre, of whom we hear relatively little in the history of Israel? We have no record of them fighting Israel: relations were usually very friendly. The answer is that there are several factors that brought special judgment on Tyre: pride, responsibility, corruption, vindictiveness, and religious presumption.

God hates pride. Whatever is exalted must be brought to shame, that man may learn wisdom. Tyre was very proud & prosperous, the great central world mart of nations. It claimed, with a certain amount of truth, that 'I am of perfect beauty'—27:3.

Tyre was more responsible than most nations, because of its close contact and relationship with Israel. In the days of David & Solomon it was highly privileged to be a key factor in the building of God's Temple, as to both material & workmanship. There appears evidence that its religious beliefs were influenced by Israel: at least it was very intimately exposed to the Law of God. Its king Hiram, the 'lover of David,' speaks with a reverence for Yahweh indicating intelligent belief.

But later, through Ahab and Jezebel, it became a source of dreadful corruption and abomination, enforced from the throne and threatening to obliterate the worship of God. This was the great issue & showdown that Elijah forced at Carmel: Tyre's Baal or Israel's Yahweh.

Ch.28: The prince (king) of Tyre says 'I am a god: I sit in the seat of God'—v. 2. Most oriental monarchs made such claims; but this chapter seems to intimate—with its reference to

cherubs, and Eden, and the precious stones of his garments (like the High Priest's breastplate) that the king of Tyre came much closer and more wickedly to aping the true God and His worship (with which he would be familiar).

Israel was being destroyed. Tyre was prosperous, seemingly secure in its island bastion and with its strong fleets, from Babylon's power. Tyre seems to have been trading on & abusing the privilege of its close relationship to Israel and Israel's God, & claiming to be the inheritor of now-rejected Israel's blessings and position. This would give more force & meaning to the very unusual language of ch. 28. Certainly she rejoiced vindictively at Israel's fall, seeing therein the removal of a rival:

"Tyros hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the *gates* of the people. She is turned unto me: *I* shall be replenished, now *she* is laid waste" (26:2).

It is clear from the history that the rivalry was both commercial & *religious*. For her arrogance, she was to be completely obliterated. She was destroyed several times, and she lost her world prominence, and commercial power and wealth, but it was many centuries before the prophecies of her permanent destruction were completely fulfilled.

PROPHECIES (against Egypt) IN 10th, 11th, 12th & 27th YEARS—CHS. 29-32

Chs. 29-32 contain the judgments on Egypt. These prophecies began in the 10th year, about the time Hophra, king of Egypt, was marching to the relief of Israel. He forced Nebuchadnezzar to raise the siege of Jerusalem, but was soon driven back to Egypt, & did not try again.

Ch.29: After 2000 previous years of prominent world power, Egypt should become a base nation, and not lift itself again.

Ch.30: The rivers (canals) should be dry, the land waste, the cities desolate, the idols destroyed: no more a prince of Egypt. (Isa. 19 adds other details: papyrus & linen to cease; land to be ruled by strangers).

Ch.31: As Assyria fell, suddenly crushed from mighty power to utter powerlessness, so Egypt should be brought down.

Ch.32: A lamentation for Egypt: her heaven darkened; her sun obscured. She shall make her grave with the mighty who had gone before.

These prophecies have been fulfilled: overall, and in remarkable detail. This exact time, under Nebuchadnezzar, was the turning point for Egypt. She plunged down, never to rise. *None* of her ancient great cities remain: the present large cities have all been built by foreigners. Papyrus, which supplied the world's paper for over 3000 years, down to the 10th century AD, and was Egypt's chief article of commerce, no longer even exists there. For centuries it was world renowned for the exquisite fineness of its linen. Samples have been found of finer weave than anything produced today. All that vanished under God's judgments, though some of it took many centuries.

But, like Israel, there was to be a latter-day restoration. Though still a very weak & inconsequential country, dependent on foreign help, as the prophecy requires, Egypt has, within our own times —the 'Latter Days'— like Israel achieved independence for the first time in 2000 yrs.

PROPHECIES IN 12th YEAR OF CAPTIVITY—585 BC—CHS. 33-39

Ch.33: Now, for the final 16 chs., Ezekiel turns back to Israel. God says to him—v. 2, '*Speak to the children of thy people.*' His long silence toward them, which began when the siege of Jerusalem started, is to be ended. This was the occasion of the news arriving of the city's fall:

"In the 12th year, 10th month, 5th day, one came saying, The city is smitten ... And my mouth was opened and I was no more dumb" (vs. 21-22).

Vs. 31-32 present much food for thought and self-examination—

"They sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they do not do them. For with their *mouth* they show *much love*, but their *heart* goeth after their covetousness [worldly interests].

"Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, & can play well on an instrument: for they *hear* thy words, but they *do* them not."

We tend to picture Israel as openly rejecting God, & neglecting His services, but this clearly was not the case. They made *every* pretence & profession & appearance of obedience and acceptance. They went through *all* the motions, and fulfilled *all* the outward forms.

They just didn't bother to give Him their *lives*, or to let His service interfere with their own desires and interests. They were wonderful Sunday morning believers, and maybe even Sunday evening and midweek class attenders (translating it into our own terms), and they no doubt spoke up loyally for God against the heathen.

It was just in strict *obedience* to His commands that they fell short, and for which they were so terribly punished. When He said, Keep separate, they didn't. When He said, Don't marry into the world, they did. When He said, Give Me your whole life and service, they wouldn't. Isaiah and Jeremiah record the same divine complaint—

"This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, but have removed their heart far from Me" (Isa. 29:13) "Thou (God) art near in their mouth, and far from their reins (affections, heart)"—Jer. 12:2.

But in Ezekiel's message, God is about finished with judgment and condemnation. Jerusalem has been destroyed, and the land desolated. Instead of the captives going home, as the false prophets had promised, 1000s more are being driven off into captivity, in herds like cattle.

It looked like the end of everything, but Ezekiel's message hereafter is full of marvellous revelation, promise and hope.

Ch.34: He has just a few more words of condemnation first—1:10, not against the people, but against the wicked rulers who exploited them for their own profit, and simply as an introduction to the promise of a perfectly just, righteous, and loving Ruler to come (23-29)—

"I will set up one Shepherd, even My servant David (*'the Beloved'*). And I will make with them a Covenant of Peace ... They shall no more be a prey to the heathen .. & I will raise up for them a Plant of Renown."

Ch.35: The judgment of Mt. Seir, or Edom. This seems out of place. Why is it not in the previous section: the prophecies against the heathen? This is something different and deeper. This is the ancient enmity between flesh and spirit.

Truly, the *natural* Edom is involved, but only as the foundation of the *spiritual* type and lesson that is carried through into the Millennium, for it is millennial things that Ezekiel is dealing with now—

"When the *whole earth* rejoiceth, I will make *thee* (Edom) desolate" (v.14).
Isaiah says the same thing (34:5-10)—

"My sword shall come down upon Idumea ... The Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah ... It is the day of the Lord's vengeance ... The smoke thereof shall go up *for ever* ... none shall pass through it *FOR EVER* "

It is from *Bozrah in Edom* that Christ comes with dyed garments. Here is the first encounter with the arch-enemy of the last days. It is very fitting, then, that as a solemn memorial for the instruction of mankind, that first battlefield should be preserved through the Millennium in the state of desolation, like the memorial Gehenna of Isaiah's last verse.

Ch.36 is a comforting message of rebirth and rebuilding of the land in peopled fruitfulness and prosperity. Several times we are told that *this time* it is *for ever*—no more to suffer any sorrow or oppression.

V. 22 begins an important message that makes it clear *natural* Israel is the subject, and that these things cannot be 'spiritualized' away—

"I do not this for your sakes, but for Mine holy Name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went."

This is clearly the same people who were scattered: national Israel. Spiritual Israel cannot be so addressed. Then note the order of events—

"I will take you from among the heathen, & bring you into your own land. THEN will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness" (vs. 24-25).

This does not contradict the purging out of the rebels *before* Israel is taken into the land—ch. 20. Many will be regathered, as today, in blindness and by apparent natural means. And purging out the rebels will still leave Israel as a nation with much cleansing to do, in national mourning, and submission to their rejected Messiah—Zech. 12:10-14; 13:6-9.

Ch.37: The Valley of Dry Bones: Israel's national rebirth. What generation has ever been so privileged as ours: to see age-old prophecy of the Last Days so dramatically fulfilled and confirmed before our eyes? We dare not allow our awe and wonder to be dulled by the now familiarity of these stupendous events. Remember 50 years ago, when we excitedly counted the Jews going back one by one? This long-foretold rebirth is one of the greatest witnesses God has ever given.

Chs. 38-39 tell the familiar story of the descent and destruction of Gog, to manifest God's glory and power *to all the earth*. Not only is the rebirth of Israel a guarantee of the fulfilment of this next step, but we actually see Gog himself devoting all his resources to building the greatest military and naval power the world has ever known, and openly & avowedly dedicated to bringing the earth under his system.

And even further: his enmity is specifically and especially directed toward that one little land: that little Mordecai who dares oppose him. And with him in enmity stand the red-handed papal power, & Libya and Ethiopia and Assyria, just as prophecy requires. When a recent Pope visited the Middle East, he fawned effusively on the Arabs who want to destroy Israel, but he walked gingerly around the borders of Israel as if he were walking around a deep black hole.

The glorious consummation is described at the end of ch. 39—

"Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity [*spiritual Israel?*] among the heathen: but I have gathered them into their own land, & have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide My face any more from them, for I have poured out My Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord."

This ended Ezekiel's message to them in the 12th year of the captivity, when the news of the city's destruction had come, and all present hope had been utterly destroyed.

PROPHECIES IN 25th YEAR OF CAPTIVITY—572 BC—CHS. 40-49

Chs. 40-48 came 13 years later, in the 25th year of captivity. Ezekiel was now 50, if the '30th year' of 1:1 is his age, as seems likely. He has now been prophesying for 20 years. God had said through him—

"I will set MY SANCTUARY in the midst of them for ever more" (37:26).

Isaiah had said that the 'mountain of the *Lord's House*' should be established at Jerusalem, & all nations should go there to learn God's ways—2:23, & that there should be a '*House of Prayer for All Nations*'—56:7.

And Zechariah was later to say, when the captives returned under Zerubbabel, that the nations should go up yearly to worship the Lord and keep the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem—14:16.

In his final chapters, Ezekiel is shown a huge building—a Temple that had the appearance of the 'frame of a city,' in the midst of a 'Holy Oblation' of land about 45 miles square in the midst of Palestine.

To this huge structure—apparently a magnificent open framework of masonry and arches densely covered by living greenery, and in the open centre of which is a great elevated Altar—Ezekiel sees—43:2 God's glory returning, and:

"The Glory of the Lord filled the House" (v. 5).

And to him God said (v.7)—

"Son of Man, the place of My throne, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel FOR EVER. And My holy Name shall the house of Israel *no more defile*."

The whole purpose is summed up in 44:23—

"They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane; and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean."

This is the whole purpose of life and learning. There *is* unclean, and *death*; and there *is* clean, and *life*. True knowledge consists of knowing the difference; true wisdom consists of choosing the clean. Everything falls into one category or the other.

God tells Ezekiel to show Israel the pattern of the House, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities—43:10. How would it make them ashamed? How would it make *us* ashamed?

By its glory and greatness and *goodness*. It is a beautiful centre of goodness and joy and mercy and forgiveness, & of learning to choose the good and eschew the evil. It is a glorious provision and manifestation of God's love and care for Israel and the world. It is such a wonderful contrast to man's present evil condition and ways.

It is the heart of the Divine Promise and Purpose from the beginning that 'all nations of the earth shall be blessed'—Gen. 12:3, and 'all the earth shall be full of the Glory of God—Num. 14:21.

The old Temple was gone. It had been desecrated beyond the possibility of redemption. It had been filled with blood and corruption.

But in a new day to come, there would be a new House of Prayer, far more spacious and splendid, not just for Israel but for the whole world—the centre of an earth at rest in holiness and peace.

And, best of all, the name of the City from that day and forward shall be: "*THE LORD IS THERE*."—G.V.G.
