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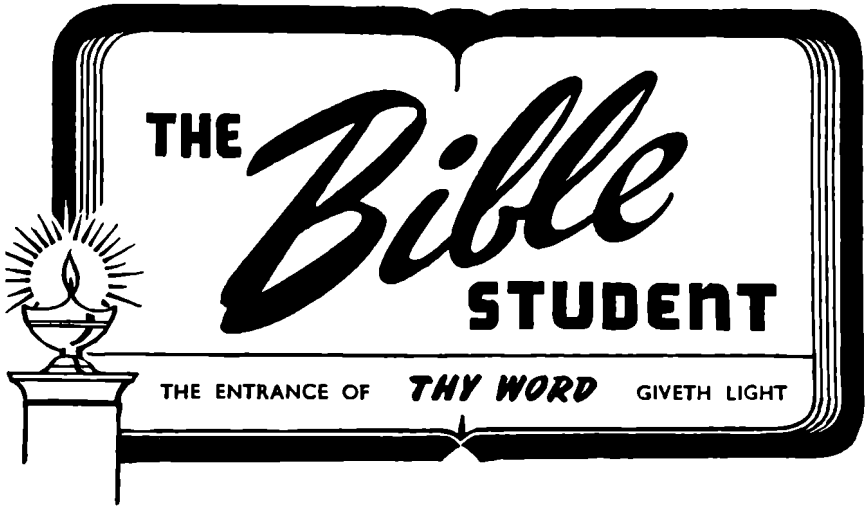
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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

our constantly being 'towards Christ', even as with the Lord Himself, Who alone could say in truth, 'I have set the Lord always before my face, therefore I shall not be moved'.

(c) *Our thinking is to be pure, even as He is pure.* Many editors and commentators hold that the phrase 'and the purity' in our text is a gloss and should be omitted. But it is retained in the R.V., and, at any rate is *one* of the aspects of that 'simplicity that is towards Christ,' for everything that is associated with Him must be pure, and it is the antithesis of the 'corrupting' that leads us from Him. This condition is not merely a negative one in which there is the absence of that which is impure, but it is a positive activity of the pursuit of, and occupation with, that which is pure.

If we allow our minds to be occupied by that which is impure we shall have our minds 'corrupted from that which is towards Christ'. Thus, in the illustration Paul uses, did Eve who allowed the serpent's suggestions that there were higher planes attainable which, once reached, would give a more advanced knowledge, and put them on an equality with the gods. How often such suggestions have been offered to the aspiring mind, and regions of advanced knowledge and of higher reasoning have been entered only to corrupt the mind from 'the simplicity which is toward Christ'! It is ever necessary to heed the warning of the Apostle and to beware lest we also be beguiled.

Let the mind be 'without folds', with no 'backward thought', but ever directed in singleness of purpose towards Christ.

THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL

By H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

The Judgment on the Priestly Leaders, 11: 1-12

It has been urged that this section is an isolated prophecy, placed here for convenience, or that it has been accidentally moved from its original place after 8:18; the ground for this view is that there is no room for it here, as God's judgment has already been carried out (9:1-10:2, see especially 9:6) and there is no room for any further judgment. When, however, the purely symbolic nature of the still future judgment is remembered, the difficulty seems to disappear. It is, moreover, a commonplace in

Hebrew narrative to place elements, which would hold up its flow, out of their strict chronological order.

There are no serious grounds for doubting that the twenty-five men (v. 1) are the same as in 8:16. The description in v. 6 agrees with 8:17, and their activity in v. 2 suits their position as leading priests, while their blatant idolatry (8:16 f) matches their cynicism (v. 3). The two names given us cannot be identified with any probability.

With their rejection of Jehovah went a rejection of His will. They refused to see in the capture of Jerusalem and the deportation of Jehoiachin the confirmation of Jeremiah's message and the judgment of God. They saw in their position a sign of God's favour rather than the reverse. It is not clear whether we should follow the R.V. text or mg. in v. 3, but in either case the general gist of their words is clear enough. If we take the R.V. text, it means 'Let us prepare for war'; to follow the margin means, 'Let us ignore all warnings of judgment to come'. In either case they were basing themselves on the confidence that however hot the flames of Babylonian attack, the city walls would protect them, even as a cauldron protects its contents from the fire. They were basing themselves on the fact that Nebuchadnezzar had never technically captured Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 24:12) and still more on their fanatical trust in the Temple condemned by Jeremiah (Jer. 7:4).

'We be the flesh' reflects further the pride of those left in the city, which had already been condemned by Jeremiah (Jer. 24). For them the exiles under Jehoiachin were the offal thrown out on the dung-heap of Babylonia; they were the good flesh preserved by God in Jerusalem.

The spirit of prophecy fell on Ezekiel (v. 5), and in pronouncing their doom he declared that God's favourites would be those whose deaths they had caused (v. 6 f). They would not even have the privilege of dying in Jerusalem (v. 7-10). Undoubtedly we have here a prediction of the execution of some of the leaders of the people at Riblah (2 Kings 25:18-21), but since judgment fell on Pelatiah at once, so in the case of some of the others it may have meant merely death in exile. Death in a heathen land, and that probably without burial, was looked on as an aggravation of God's punishment (cf. Am. 7:17).

Though Pelatiah did not hear Ezekiel's message, there is no

ground for considering his death as visionary. This result of his message was completely unexpected by Ezekiel, and it drove him to intercession (v. 13). Goethe, early in his famous play, shows Faust sitting down to translate the Gospel according to John. He says:

'Tis writ, 'In the beginning was the word!
 I pause perplex'd! Who now will help afford?
 I cannot the mere Word so highly prize;
 I must translate it otherwise,
 If by the spirit guided as I read,
 'In the beginning was the Sense!' Take heed,
 The import of this primal sentence weigh,
 Lest thy too hasty pen be led astray!
 Is force creative then of Sense the dower?
 'In the beginning was the Power!'
 Thus should it stand; yet, while the line I trace
 A something warns me, once more to efface.
 The spirit aids! 'from anxious scruples freed,
 I write, 'In the beginning was the Deed!'

Faust here stands for the modern man and his suspicion of words. He has no understanding for the old tales of magic and wonder in which the right word or words are so important. But with all the folly of these tales our forefathers were expressing their awe of words, there having remained with them some broken and distorted memory of the power of the divine Word.

When Ezekiel spoke the Word of God he had caused something to come into being that was active and creative. The sudden death of Pelatiah reminded him of his other messages of woe, which if allowed to go into full operation, might imperil the existence of all Israel.

The Church today suffers from too much preaching. Sunday by Sunday a spate of words is poured out all around the world, but their fruit is small in proportion to their quantity. Few who speak really grasp that they are there to proclaim the Word of God and not their views about the Word, and so there are only few who know the power that belongs to the Word.

God's Grace to the Exiles (11: 14-21)

God answered Ezekiel's plea by confirming the promise He had earlier given to Jeremiah (Jer. 24) and expanding it. His promise is apparently addressed not merely to the exiles with Jehoiachin but also to the earlier exiles from the North ('all of them',

* Goethe: *Faust*, Pt. I, 1.876-889, translated by A. Swanwick

v. 15 R.V.). We should follow the chief versions in this verse and read 'the men of thy exile', i.e., thy fellow exiles (so R.S.V.) instead of the impossible 'the men of thy kindred', which is not even a true translation of the Hebrew. We should also absolve those left in Jerusalem of callous cruelty by rendering with a minor change in the Hebrew vowels 'They have gone far from the LORD' (R.S.V.). Primitive conceptions like the one we find in 1 Sam. 26:19 were still prevalent; the exiles were looked on as far from Jehovah, because far from His land, while those living near the temple were thought to be basking in the smile of his favour.

The English versions seem to miss the force of the Hebrew in vs. 16, 17, which should be rendered: 'Whereas I have removed them . . . and whereas I have scattered them . . . and have become to them a sanctuary in small measure . . . therefore . . . I will gather you.' In fact v. 16 seems to be an indirect continuation of the Jerusalemites' claim; Jehovah answers it in v. 17 with a promise of restoration. The 'little sanctuary' of A.V. has been a comfort to many, but as a translation it seems to be linguistically impossible. We are not dealing with a gracious promise, but with the spiritual loss felt by the exiles by their separation from the temple. The exile was punishment. Like all God's punishments it was remedial for some and productive of ultimate blessing, yet even those that profited most had to feel its bitterness to the full.

The threefold 'you' in v. 17 is emphatic in contrast to v. 15. The interpretation of v. 19 is complicated by textual difficulties. Three MSS and the Syriac read 'a new heart and a new spirit'. The change of text involved in Hebrew is small, but on the whole it is likely that it is an unconscious or deliberate assimilation to 18:31; 36:26. LXX and Vulgate read 'another heart and a new spirit'. Here the only change involved concerns the two most easily confounded letters in Hebrew, *ṣ* and *d*. The present Hebrew text may be supported by an appeal to Jer. 32:39, but since here too LXX has in both cases 'another' for 'one', we merely have added proof of how easily these two words could be confused. The Targum, the official rabbinic translation into Aramaic, has 'a fearful heart'. This is a legitimate paraphrase of either LXX or the Syriac rendering, but not of the Hebrew. So we shall probably be safe in rendering 'another heart', or possibly 'a new heart', there being no essential difference in meaning; the

remainder of the verse seems to support this. If we retain the Hebrew text, 'one heart' refers presumably to the removal of the old jealousies between north and south, cf. 37:22. 'Within you' should be as in many MSS and all the versions 'within them' (R.S.V.).

Though we shall consider the gracious promise of vs. 17-20 in closer detail, when we deal with its fullest form in 36:16-38, there is one point that should be noted here. Though Ezekiel stresses the sovereignty of God, he is no determinist. Salvation is God's work, but man has to prepare the way for it by repentance. God brings back the people to their land (v. 17), but before the transformation of character (v. 19 f), which is also God's work, there is the removal of all traces of idolatry by the people (v. 18), the outward sign of their change of heart. Note in this connection 18:31 and see the notes on ch. 18 as a whole.

Similarly the judgment on those left in Jerusalem is nothing arbitrary, the result of an unexplained divine decree. We have no parallel in the Bible to the expression 'the heart of their detestible things' (v. 21). In addition the Hebrew is much more difficult than the English implies. So we should almost certainly make a small emendation and translate with R.S.V., 'But as for those whose heart goes after their detestible things and their abominations . . .' These are in the first place the men of Jerusalem, as the vision of ch. 8 had shown, and their destruction would be the punishment of their impenitent idolatry. But the threat holds good for the exiles too, if they cling to their old idols or turn to the idols of Babylon (cf. 14:2-6).

The Temple forsaken (11: 22-25)

Ezekiel's long vision ended with the sight of the withdrawal of the chariot-throne eastward to the Mount of Olives. Years later he was to see it return to the new temple by the way that it had gone (43:1-4). But from now on, however long the final judgment might be deferred (in fact a trifle under five years), the Temple was only an empty shell, and the offerings brought there a mere outward show. Rev. 3:20 reveals that the same may become true of a Christian church.

The Fate of King and People (12: 1-20)

Ezekiel had told the exiles his vision of the destruction of Jerusalem (11:25). But then he had to reinforce his message by

foretelling Zedekiah's fate in actions and words that had to remain enigmatic until their fulfilment; but how literally they were fulfilled! Note that this prophetic action took place in 591 or 590 B.C. (cf. 20:1 with 8:1), but Zedekiah's revolt did not break out till 588 B.C.

The need for the prophecy is given by the term 'a rebellious house' applied to the exiles (vs. 2, 3, 9). They were obviously still hoping for an early return to Jerusalem, and so they had no eyes for Ezekiel's vision of destruction. So the prophet revived one of the saddest moments of the exiles' lives by making a little bundle of necessities such as a man would carry as he went into exile and trudging with it over his shoulder to another part of Tel-Abib—'Son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight . . .' (v. 3, R.S.V., cf. R.V. mg. to vs. 3, 4). Having awakened the exiles' curiosity, in the evening (v. 4) he carried the bundle home. Before the wondering crowd (v. 5) he dug through the house wall (built of sun-dried bricks, as the poorer houses always were in Babylonia), brought out his bundle, wrapped his face up so that he could not see, and staggered off in the darkness with his bundle.

In the explanation (vs. 10-16) Ezekiel was told that he had acted out the special fate of Zedekiah in the general exile. It looked forward to his flight by night through the breached city wall (2 Kings 25:4), his capture, blinding and leading into exile (2 Kings 25:5ff). Note that Jehovah is pictured as Himself snaring Zedekiah and bringing him to his doom (v. 13).

In v. 10 we apparently have the same play on the two meanings of *massa*' (cf. R.V. text and mg.) as we have in Jer. 23:33 (R.V. mg.). The root meaning of the word is 'to lift up', and so it can equally mean a burden, or an oracle lifted up over someone. The R.S.V. '... all the house of Israel who are in it' is probably correct.

In our study of ch. 34 we shall see why the Messianic king is called 'prince' (*nasi*') in the prophecy of the restoration, but Ezekiel's reason for using *nasi*' of Zedekiah is another. He never calls him king (*melek*) as he does Jehoiachin (17:12), cf. 21:25, for the general description in 7:27 can hardly be regarded as an exception to this statement.

The clue is given by the only other use of *nasi*' for a reigning king, viz., 1 King 11:34, where it is applied to Solomon. Clearly the implication there is that Solomon had forfeited his right to be

king by reason of his sin. Ezekiel regarded Jehoiachin as the true king (cf. 'B.S.', Vol. xxiii, p. 150 and 17:13); the Judæan kingship had ended with his exile. This is the attitude of the Chronicler as well, as may be deduced from the way he dismisses Zedekiah's reign (2 Chr. 36:11 ff). Ezekiel may well have been influenced too by his foreknowledge of Zedekiah's broken oath (see notes on ch. 17.).

The acted fate of Zedekiah was followed by the acting out of the fate of the people (vs. 17-20); this section is largely a repetition of 4:9-12. But while there the stress was on the small quantities carefully measured, here it is on the dismay and anxiety with which his rations were eaten. We are not told how Ezekiel expressed these emotions, but he was doubtless able to communicate them vividly.

'BEHOLD MY SERVANT'!

By A. McD. REDWOOD

'I must work the works of Him that sent me while
it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.'

Isaiah's prophecy contains the portrait of the Divine Servant, revealing something of His personal qualifications and the work He would accomplish. One of the distinctive passages is in ch. 42:1-4, 'Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.' The verses that follow define certain details of His work, more specially verse 7, 'To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.' In chapter 53 God calls Him 'my righteous servant', implying not merely that His character is righteous, but that the divine righteousness and its realization in human experience is to be the objective of His ministry.

Moreover, the Servant was to receive the special anointing of the Holy Spirit for His great work. The prophet stresses the fact in three different passages which are worth noting. The first in ch. 11:1 ff., 'The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the