

INTRODUCTION

THOUGH a number of works on Ezekiel intended for the scholar have appeared in recent years, there is very little for the serious student of Scripture who is not concerned with critical problems and who is unable to read the prophet in the original.

This study has taken into consideration the rush of modern life, which makes it difficult for so many to give long hours of study to an individual Old Testament book; it has also borne in mind that those who will probably welcome it most are just those who can least afford expensive works. I have tried to make Ezekiel's message clear by taking his prophecy chapter by chapter and section by section. Though I have not consciously glossed over any difficulty in the book, I have ignored all critical questions which I considered to have no direct bearing on the interpretation, and where the text of the Revised Version seemed to make the sense tolerably clear, I have refrained from pedantic exactitude. Where the meaning of the message has seemed obvious, I have not hesitated to dismiss a chapter in a paragraph. The space so saved has been used for fuller discussion of problems which either have contemporary interest, or are generally misunderstood by the average Bible student.

Those who regard the prophets mainly as guides to the future are likely to be disappointed by this work. For me "the prophet speaks *primarily* to the men of his own time, and his message springs out of the circumstances in which he lives."¹ Hence we will best understand Ezekiel as we try to grasp what his own generation should have understood and only then re-interpret, if necessary, in the light of the New Testament. In dealing with the prophecies of the future I have therefore been normally more concerned with what Ezekiel's contemporaries were to understand by them than with what we may read into them from the standpoint of the New Testament. Where eschatology enters a work of this kind, it is necessary to make certain assumptions unless one has unlimited space for digressions. I have assumed that after the Second Advent of Christ there will be a long period in which God's original purpose in creating nature around us will be displayed and vindicated; in

¹ *My Men Spoke from God*, p. 14.

this period the nations that have only imperfectly been embraced in the Church's missionary work will have the knowledge of God brought to them. I have applied the term Millennium to this period, but I must not be taken to be saying Amen to much of the gross materialism that is postulated of this period in so much popular literature. For me the Millennium is essentially the time in which the limitations of the earthly are prepared for the eternal state; my thinking on this subject has been deeply influenced by P. Althaus: *Die Letzten Dinge*.

This work is intended not to give my views on Ezekiel, but to help Ezekiel speak to the present age. Hence the reader will lose much of its value unless the Revised Version is open before him as well. If he uses the Authorized or King James' Version, he is apt to meet only vexation in some of the more difficult passages. Normally I have made no reference to the incorrect renderings of AV.

I owe a deep debt to Dr. G. A. Cooke's commentary on *Ezekiel* in the International Critical Commentary and to a less extent to the corresponding volume in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges for their help in the many difficult passages, where the language is hard to interpret. The ordinary reader failing to find some linguistic point adequately dealt with here cannot do better than refer to the latter volume. The interpretation of the thought is, however, mine alone, for I have not hesitated to follow what seemed to me to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit; let His be the praise and mine the blame. Periodically I have disagreed with those whose views I respect; in these cases I have normally referred in a footnote to some treatment of the subject that presents the other side.

Those familiar with my *Men Spoke from God* will notice that in a number of points I have changed my opinion. That is how it should be. One cannot live with a man like Ezekiel for nearly four years—most of this work has appeared first in quarterly instalments in that estimable but all too little known periodical *The Bible Student*¹—without his growing immeasurably in stature and as a result some of one's views, especially the more critical, changing.

I have deliberately omitted an index partly to keep the price of the book down, partly because it seemed unnecessary. Since the order of Ezekiel is preserved and there are many sub-headings and cross-references, it should be possible to find the treatment of any desired point at least as quickly as if there were an index.

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¹ Now ceased publication.