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TWO PROBLEMS IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

by DANE R. GORDON

THE more radical literary and historical criticism of the Book of Ezekiel lagged behind the similar treatment of other prophetic books of the Old Testament, but it has been pursued actively in recent decades. In the last few years, however, there have been many signs of a vigorous revival of the conservative view of the origin and composition of the book. Two of the problems which confront the student who wishes to give a consistent account of Ezekiel's work are re-examined here by Mr. Gordon, a Cambridge graduate resident in New York.

UNIL recent years no one seriously questioned the authenticity of the book of Ezekiel. McFadyen adhered to the traditional view, and writing in *Peake's Commentary* did not refer to a problem. One of the first to do so was Ewald, who has since been followed by many critics each professing to have a different solution, and all seeking, mainly, to resolve two problems.

I

The first of these is, how did Ezekiel, although deported to Babylon several years before the fall of his own city, have an intimate knowledge of Jewish affairs in Jerusalem? How was it that, as a result of this, he preached to the Jerusalem Jews messages which they could not possibly hear, and acted for them signs which they could not possibly see? There are several examples of these in the book. He is found in the Temple silently observing the idolatry of the elders (ch. 8). He draws a picture upon a tile, or clay tablet, of the siege of Jerusalem (ch. 4). He lies upon his side to illustrate his people's shame (ch. 4); he scatters his hair to the wind to describe their confusion (ch. 5). This he does hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. One is thus led to ask whether the book was really written in Babylon, and if not where it was written, and how?

Several solutions have been offered: ¹ Kraetschmer and Hermann

¹See Oesterley and Robinson, *Introduction to the O.T.*, pp. 318 ff.

reject the unity of the book, but, unlike Kraetschmer, Hermann credits it all to Ezekiel who, he believes, wrote it at different periods in his life. Hölscher, working on certain assumptions—e.g. that individual responsibility of sin is post-exilic, and that Ezekiel was a poet and not a prophet—rejects five-sixths of the book which does not fit his theory. Oesterley and Robinson accuse him of manipulating his facts. Kittel accepts unity of authorship at the cost of giving Ezekiel two distinct personalities. In other words, he became a different person in different places. Torrey almost wholly excludes Ezekiel's own work. He believes that the references to Jerusalem in the first twenty-four chapters were by an unknown prophet and that the rest was pseudepigrammatic. James Smith associates Ezekiel with the North where he is said to have composed his oracles, and, relying upon a statement by Josephus that Ezekiel wrote two books (*Antiq.*, x. 5. 1), posits a redactor who joined them. Hertrich believes that Ezekiel prophesied in Jerusalem until 596, that he took his writings to Babylon with him and added to them, and that after his death a redactor gave the whole a Babylonian dress. This is the point of view of Oesterley and Robinson.²

As this book has proved to be such a happy hunting ground of solutions there may be room for one more. The trend of thought has assumed that to preach in one place about another is either impossible or illogical. It does not necessarily follow that prophecies uttered in Babylon would be ineffective in Jerusalem. The two cities were distant but they were connected by a trade route which led, indirectly, to the sea, and to the Persian Gulf. It is not unlikely that there was a steady flow of commerce between the two cities. Even the circumstances of war would not wholly stop this as Jerusalem was shut up only in time of pressing emergency, and it is in the nature of men to trade. (There is the curious incident in which British boots were sold to Napoleon's army, despite the blockade, during the Napoleonic war.) The Semites, moreover, are great storytellers, and in desert lands this was (and probably still is) the method of relaying information. A prophecy or parable acted or spoken in Babylon could soon be transmitted with force and accuracy to Jerusalem. Similarly, the news about Jerusalem and the words of Jeremiah would be carried to Babylon. Ezekiel would not be uninformed.

In II Kings 24: 14, we read that Nebuchadnezzar took away

² [Or, rather, the point of view of Oesterley; he was responsible for the section on Ezekiel in their *Introduction*. T. H. Robinson has always accepted Ezekiel's unity, authenticity, and Babylonian origin.—ED.]

first all the leaders of the people. If this is so then they and their descendants would be expected to take a lead when they returned. It was, therefore, as important, if not more important at the time, for his fellow-captives to grasp Ezekiel's teaching as for the Jews still in Jerusalem. The fact that the prophet greatly influenced later Judaism may be due in part to his presence in Babylon while he ministered to Jerusalem before and after the fall

II

The second problem concerns the man himself. Was he a prophet? Many burning passages suggest that he was. He prophesied the destruction of the city (ch. 5; 11), the capture and blinding of Zedekiah (12: 8 ff.) and the need for spiritual revival (ch. 37). Was he also the poet who wrote of Tyre (ch. 27) and Egypt (ch. 32)? Was it the same man who concerned himself (ch. 40 ff.) with a new and glorious Temple and its ritual worship? Was he also the mystic who could project himself, or be projected from one place to the other?

There have been several people in whom were combined diverse gifts. Pascal was a great scientist and an inspired writer. He was also a mystic. So he united in his character the extremes of logical thought and intense emotion. St. Theresa was also a mystic, a writer, and a devout and obedient member of the Catholic Church. She showed a keen understanding of doctrinal issues, which appeared in the most exalted of her writings, as for example in *The Interior Castle*. To find in Ezekiel the inspired writer, poet, and mystic, and the reflective priest is not impossible nor improbable. It is even less so when one considers that he was a man chosen by God for a divine purpose. Perhaps he realized that the spiritual content of Judaism could be carried through the next six hundred years only in the vessel of organized Temple worship. It is true that the spirit was overshadowed by the Temple ritual, but it survived and was reinterpreted by Jesus Christ to the world. It seems, therefore, that the divergent characteristics of the prophet and of the book have a profound coherence which proceeds quite naturally from one writer.

Concerning Ezekiel's mystical visits to Jerusalem one is reminded of St. Paul's vision of things which cannot be uttered. He did not know whether he was in the spirit or not. Handel, when writing the Messiah, "thought that he saw the great God himself" The proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research contain examples of projection. There are many accounts, which appear from time to time, in the papers, of people who, in dreams, were

witnesses to present or future events many miles away. This vivid super-sensitiveness is a characteristic of mysticism, as is prognostication of one's death or the death of another—in Ezekiel's case his wife. If, with regard to Ezekiel, we allow for the direct activity of God it is possible to say that He was working through the prophet in a manner conformable with the mind as we know it.

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