

we are not departing from him, or opposing ourselves to him, but only guarding his truth against errors that have sought shelter under the cover of his great name.

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### *EZEKIEL, CHAPTER IV.*

#### A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL PROBLEM.

THE fourth chapter of Ezekiel has always been a puzzle to Bible students. The things signified are, of course, obvious enough. The city was to endure the horror of a long and trying siege, including a famine in which food would become very scarce, and much of it of a poor and even horrible description. The capture of the city was to be followed by a forty years' exile in a country of idolaters. The only difficulty that here arises concerns the 390 years which seem assigned without any known reason to Israel's exile. But this difficulty practically disappears if we read with LXX. 190 in *v.* 5, and understand the 150 of the LXX. in *v.* 4 to refer in round numbers to the part of the Israelitish exile which was already past, excluding the forty years still predicted for both kingdoms. In this case we must understand Ezekiel as meaning that the exile of both kingdoms would end simultaneously when that of Israel had lasted 190, and that of Judah 40 years (cf. what is said of the two kingdoms in xxxvii. 15-22). The further question concerning the fulfilment of the prophecy does not now concern us.

But though the interpretation of the prophecy thus presents no serious difficulty, what is to be said about the means employed by Ezekiel to represent these predictions? What in fact did Ezekiel really do or not do? To take the passage throughout as a detailed description of an acted parable involves great difficulties. To begin with the

context of the passage (cf. iii. 24, 25 with iv. 8) seems to suggest that Ezekiel was at the time confined to his house, and under the influence of some natural or supernatural constraint which rendered speech and, to a considerable extent, movement impossible (iv. 8). In such circumstances the symbolical parable would be, of course, one of dumb show. This is conceivable and indeed in itself by no means improbable. But who was there to witness such an acted parable? Occasional visitors there may have been; but it seems suggested that this was part of Ezekiel's definite and public ministration (see iv. 12). In other cases where a message is intended for a particular set of people they are distinctly specified (see viii. 1; xiv. 1; xx. 1). That the prophet in this peculiar state, whatever may have been the cause, should have made himself an object of exhibition seems, moreover, even when we take full account of its religious purpose, contrary to the spirit of the injunction in iii. 24-26.

Then, again, there are difficulties concerning the preparation of the food. How, it has been said, could Ezekiel have prepared the food while lying on his side? Is it to be supposed that he prepared all the food necessary before the beginning of the 190 days, and that it lasted at least 150, till he changed his position to the right side? or again, that he prepared the food at night, and lay on his side only in the day time, or such time in each day as for this purpose he was, if we may so say, on view? The last suggestion is plausible, but it is a considerable departure from a purely literal interpretation.

But even so another difficulty arises of quite a different kind. The meaning of this acted parable, so far as the predicted length of the exile is concerned, would not and could not appear until the end of the period when the number of days had been completed, and even then those who

witnessed it could hardly have realized its significance until their attention had been called to it by the prophet. The mere action alone then would not have been sufficient.

Various methods have been proposed of explaining or explaining away these difficulties. The simplest of them is to say that we are merely told that Ezekiel was commanded by Jahwe to act in this way, that is, conceived the idea as the result of a Divine impulse or suggestion; but we are not told that he even attempted to carry it out: and we may naturally suppose, therefore, that all that he did was to make the narration of what was then suggested do duty as a sort of parable, thus substituting verbal for dramatic illustration. It is going but a step further to suggest that the whole was from the first framed by Ezekiel as a parable pure and simple, that his saying that he was commanded by Jahwe to act in this way was merely a conventional way of saying that his teaching was in a broad sense the outcome of Divine inspiration.

It might be said, with reference to both these methods of interpretation, that apart from all other difficulties the introduction of such a realistic detail as that mentioned in *v.* 15 is quite inexplicable. Indeed regarded as a parable *iv.* 3 ff. is weak and jejune in the extreme.

A more plausible explanation is that the whole chapter describes part of a divine ecstasy which begins with *iii.* 22. Up to a certain point this may be conceded. It seems at least implied that the object of this ecstasy was to foretell and explain from a religious point of view that form of constraint which is described as bands laid on the prophet (*iii.* 25, *iv.* 8). What cannot be admitted is that in the ecstasy Ezekiel conceived himself as receiving a Divine command to act in a certain way, and afterwards felt himself at liberty, without attempting to carry out the instructions thus communicated, to make the command itself

do duty as a parable. Such a thing is psychologically improbable, and moreover ignores the fact that symbolical action was one of the commonest methods of prophetic teaching. Besides this it is important to bear in mind that throughout the book Ezekiel's initial formula is "The word of Jahwe came unto me," or some equivalent phrase. He desired above all things to emphasize the fact that the prediction was revealed to him by God; but he obviously intends it to be implied nevertheless that what followed was what he actually taught.

Is there then any explanation of this passage which admits of its being the description of a real action on Ezekiel's part, and yet avoids the difficulties already mentioned? It will clear the ground if we first consider the symbol of the tile and mimic earth works prescribed in *vv.* 1-3. This has clearly no necessary connexion with the symbol of lying on his side, which, according to the present arrangement of the text, forms the subject of the rest of the chapter. It is very simple, almost childish, in its conception, but, except for the symbolism that follows, no one would doubt that it is intended to describe a real symbolical act. This act seems hardly likely to have taken place in Ezekiel's house, and may have occurred either before he retired to his enforced solitude, or at some later time. If the latter, the order represents not that in which the symbols were acted, but that in which they were suggested to the prophet.

Probably the true key to the difficulty will be found to lie in understanding Ezekiel's physical condition. No thoughtful reader of this remarkable book would wish, of course, to underrate the strong virility and the spiritual and moral insight of this stern and sturdy prophet. If his mind lacked subtlety, it was at any rate deep and strong. But it is not uncommon to find high mental and moral qualities combined with some serious physical defect of a nervous

order. It seems clear that there was something abnormal about Ezekiel which cannot be wholly explained as merely a peculiarity of temperament. There appear evidences of some neurotic ailment, which affected him for longer or shorter periods. This is certainly the most natural explanation of those frequently long fits of silence which must have strangely perplexed his hearers (see esp. iii. 15, 26 ; viii. 1-xii. 25). The patience with which these were endured is one of the clearest proofs of his influence and the respect in which he was held.

It might at this point be said that we ought rather to accept the explanation that Ezekiel himself gives when he says that bands were laid upon him by Jahwe (iv. 8 ; in iii. 25 the verb should probably be taken as impersonal), and that the phenomenon was some kind of supernatural constraint and had nothing to do with any physical cause. But the deduction is not a reasonable one. However natural the infirmity, if such it was, may have been, we can readily understand that the prophet would have felt that for all that it was ordained by God and for some definite purpose.

There seems, then, reason to think that these spells of silence were what is known in medical language as aphasia, and were due to some cerebral lesion or other disturbance, being in all probability a phase of paralysis. But if so, we are bound to explain Ezekiel's lying on his side in the same way. It was plainly not, as we might at first suppose, a deliberate and voluntary act, but is described as the result of "bands" which would be laid upon him by God (*v.* 8).

This phrase, both here and in iii. 25, suggests some sort of seizure over which Ezekiel had no proper control ; but which he interpreted as sent by Jahwe as a symbolical means of teaching. It may reasonably, therefore, be supposed that it was what we commonly call a paralytic stroke.

It is a remarkable fact that aphasia is often associated with right-sided hemiplegia, which is implied in Ezekiel's lying on his left side. Left-sided hemiplegia is less commonly associated with aphasia, and generally only in left-handed people. This might account for the second stroke of the left side (involving lying on the right side) being of shorter duration (see *Enc. Brit.* Ed. 9, vol. ii. p. 171). If this hypothesis is correct, we must suppose that it was only at the time, or in its completeness only afterwards, that he fully realized the symbolical meaning which he attached to his physical ailment. Nor can we suppose that he was enabled to foresee the seizure itself and its accompaniments in all its details, such as the length of lying on each side. We find other examples in which a prophet speaks as though he had fully foreseen what was explained by future events. Jeremiah, e.g., only discovered that Hanamel's words were a message from Jahwe when he left him (xxxii. 8); but he speaks in *vv.* 6, 7 as though both Hanamel's coming and what he was going to say had been already definitely revealed before he came. Hosea speaks as though, when he married Gomer, her character and all that it symbolized had been revealed from the first (*Hos.* i. 2), but it is clear that the symbolical lesson depended very largely, if not entirely, upon her conduct after marriage. The case of Hosea is extremely interesting as forming, if the foregoing interpretation of Ezekiel's symbol is correct, a very close parallel. Hosea regards his private and domestic relations, Ezekiel his sickness as vehicles of Divine teaching.

As regards Ezekiel it is not difficult to imagine the situation. We can fancy the prophet lying restlessly on one side, at times depressed and miserable, as one stricken by God, brooding over the wrongs and iniquities of his time, until he felt as though he were himself bearing the people's sins (*vv.* 4, 5, 6); at other times with a stern frown and

wild gesture of his bare arm pouring out in dumb show the vials of Divine wrath against the city (*v.* 7). The invalid diet would become nauseous or even loathsome. The half-dreaming fancy of the brain-sick priest would even at times shrink from it in horror as the most polluted food (*vv.* 9-14). And all this again seemed to have a deeper impersonal meaning, suggesting at one time the famine diet of the beleaguered city (*vv.* 16, 17), at another the unclean and polluted food they might be expected to eat in exile (*v.* 13).

If this is the true explanation of the passage, it will be seen that there must have been a considerable degree of elaboration before the teaching which Ezekiel's illness was felt by him to symbolize was made public. In other words, what is described to us in chapter iv. is probably not only far more detailed than what was actually foretold to Ezekiel, but considerably more so than what he actually experienced. The exact number of days which he lay, or believed that he lay, on each side, the difference of interpretation in the two cases suggest calculation and reflexion, though we may fairly assume that the first was based in a general way upon the proportion between the two periods. On the other hand, such a detail as that of *v.* 15, so pointless, it would seem, from the symbolical point of view, is just the sort of thing which might be experienced in a dream.

Cornill points out that the first symbol entirely (*vv.* 1-3), and a large part of what now belongs to the second symbol, has reference to the siege, the rest of the chapter to the exile. He would, therefore, with an admirable sense of logic, rearrange the chapter so as to put together consecutively in separate divisions what belongs to these two subjects thus: (i) 4-6, 8-9, 12-15, (ii) 1-3, 10-11, 16-17. We may naturally, however, suppose that Ezekiel's object was not to write two well-arranged but remarkably dull allegories, but rather to give in the order in which they

actually occurred some curious and painful experiences, which he felt to be full of meaning for his people. The chapter ceases to have any living interest unless this experience was real.

The interpretation here given may not be felt to meet all difficulties, but there seems good reason to think that the final solution of the problem will be at least on the general lines here indicated.

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### THE SINNER IN THE CITY.

IN the study of the Gospels we are faced with several interesting problems as to identity. Is the young man who fled away naked St. Mark? Was St. Luke one of the two disciples whom the Lord joined on the way to Emmaus? The latter hypothesis is far more unlikely than the former. The unnamed disciple in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel can scarcely fail to be a member of the first apostolic group, but might be St. James, who originally was the more prominent of the sons of Zebedee.<sup>1</sup> In John xviii. 15, on the other hand, the case for the evangelist himself is stronger, and this fact may influence the verdict on the earlier passage.

That James, the brother of the Lord, is the head of the third apostolic group appears to the present writer the more likely view.<sup>2</sup> Neither that question, however, nor the identity of the beloved disciple with the son of Zebedee, may here detain us. But there is another problem which is of some importance for this article. It seems quite likely that the parable of the good Samaritan<sup>3</sup> was an answer to the question as to the great commandment in the Law.<sup>4</sup> It must be remembered that in the Gospels we have but the

<sup>1</sup> I have shown how the relative prominence altered, in a study on the Apostolic Groups (*Journal of Theological Studies*, Oct., 1908, p. 109).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Luke x. 25-37.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxii. 34-40; Mark xii. 28-34.