

THE SCENE OF EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY AND HIS AUDIENCE

PROFESSOR S. A. Cook has already written in the *JOURNAL* (xxxiii 102) a brief notice of Professor C. C. Torrey's work, *Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy* (Yale University Press, 1930). The book contains some novel views which seem to call for further discussion. The original Ezekiel, Professor Torrey declares, is a pseudepigraph, purporting to come from the reign of Manasseh, indeed from 'the thirtieth year' (Ezek. i 1) of that monarch, but in fact composed some centuries later. Further it was written not *in the land of the Chaldeans* (i 3), but in Palestine, 'as its contents show'. The exhortations are addressed 'to Judah and Jerusalem'. The book was converted into a prophecy addressed to the Jewish Captives, 'the so-called Babylonian Golah', by a redactor who accomplished his undertaking 'in all probability' not many years after the original work had appeared. 'This redaction was not the result of any chance notion or caprice on the part of the man who effected the strange transformation; on the contrary it was one of several features of a literary movement which seems to have originated in the middle of the third century B.C. having for its purpose the vindication of the religious tradition of Jerusalem' as against that of Samaria (Torrey, page 102).

But a great difficulty in the way of Professor Torrey's thesis meets us on the threshold. It is surely a highly improbable suggestion that a Jewish editor would seek to transfer a prophet's ministry from Judaea to a heathen land, to wit, to Chaldaeae. He might possibly have done this, if he had wished to discredit the prophecy he was editing, but not otherwise. The proper sphere for *JEHOVAH'S* prophets was in the Holy Land. 'Out of Galilee (of the Gentiles) ariseth no prophet', said the Jews of our Lord's time (John vii 52), and if in Jeremiah's day the exiles asserted triumphantly, '*JEHOVAH* hath raised us up prophets in Babylon', the words carry a note of surprise, perhaps even of defiance (Jer. xxix 15). Certainly these 'prophets' were predictors of smooth things whose credentials consequently were less severely scrutinized.

In Professor Torrey's mind the book of Ezekiel becomes a product of the Greek period. In xxvi 7 'Nebuchadnezzar' (it seems) is a gloss which conceals the name of Alexander the Great, and it is Alexander who is the 'Gog' of xxxviii 2, 3. Professor Cook allows in his notice that the book of Ezekiel 'contains a certain amount of very late matter', and also that the alleged reference to the Macedonian conqueror needs examination, but on the subject of the *Golah* ('the captives', Ezek. i 1)

Dr Torrey's view is surely ill-founded and improbable. The *Golah*, he tells us, is a fiction of the Chronicler. 'There can have been no extensive settlement of Jewish captives', writes Professor Torrey, 'at the time and under the circumstances depicted in our present book of Ezekiel. . . . We have no good reason to suppose, but very strong reason to doubt that any portion' of those inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judaea who were deported to Babylonia 'constituted a settlement that was ever heard from again' (*Pseudo-Ezekiel*, page 33). Dr Torrey does not believe in the existence of the *Golah*, nor apparently in *Tel-abib* as a real place; the name is not Babylonian, he remarks.

To this, however, we may reply that *Tel-abib* ('mound of growing corn') may very well be a transformation of the Babylonian *Til-abûbi* ('mound of destruction').

But if there was no *Golah*, to whom, and where did Ezekiel (i.e. Pseudo-Ezekiel) prophesy? Professor Torrey has his answer ready: it is that Pseudo-Ezekiel prophesied *in* Palestine and *to* Palestinians. 'Attentive readers will agree that the bulk of the prophecy is directly addressed to the people of Judah and Jerusalem' (*Pseudo-Ezekiel*, page 24). In this statement we may allow that there is a residuum of truth. Ezekiel in prophesying to his (perhaps) small community at *Tel-abib* is no doubt addressing a much wider audience—'the house of Israel'. His voice was conveyed by the familiar trade route of the Great River northward and eastward, reaching the scattered Hebrew communities of Mesopotamia and Syria, Judah, Jerusalem, and Egypt. Professor Torrey has done well in laying stress on the word 'Israel' as designating the audience which the prophet has in view, but to interpret 'Israel' as referring only (*or* chiefly) to Judah and Jerusalem is to miss the true (and larger) meaning of this great name. And no adequate defence is possible for Dr Torrey's further contention that there was no *Golah* to address and that 'Ezekiel' prophesied in Palestine and not 'in the land of the Chaldeans'.

The circumstances which colour the language of Ezek. i-xxxvii are those of a man who contemplates 'the land of Israel' from outside its borders, but among a community (large or small) of his own people.

Professor Torrey has failed to notice how often a particular turn of language is entirely suitable if the words were spoken to a community living outside Palestine (e.g. in the land of the Chaldeans), but much less suitable—even strange—if spoken in Judaea.

Thus in ii 5 the text runs, 'Yet shall [they] know that there hath been a prophet *among them*'. The turn of the language suggests a community living (perhaps) under special circumstances and having no expectation of hearing a prophetic voice, in other words, a community such as that of the captives at *Tel-abib*. Had the reference been to

the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem it would have been sufficient to say, 'Yet shall they know that a prophet hath spoken unto them'. No suggestion of a particular audience would have been necessary or even appropriate.

Again in xii 18 f we have language which is sane and clear only if it were used outside Palestine. 'Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, . . . and say unto the people of the land (in Hebrew *'am hā-'āreṣ*, i.e. the common people), Thus saith the Lord JEHOVAH concerning the inhabitants (לְיוֹשְׁבֵי) of Jerusalem, concerning (אֵל) the land of Israel: they shall eat their bread with carefulness (with anxiety)' . . . Here surely Ezekiel is being commissioned to announce to the *Golah* the fate which awaits their countrymen who have been left behind in Judah. The prophet is reasoning with people who hope to hear good news of the prosperity of Jerusalem and shortly to enjoy a share in it. Ezekiel has to warn them that hopes fixed on Jerusalem are vain.

Again the language of xiv 12-23 is that of one prophesying away from Jerusalem, and under other influences than those of his native land. In the first place he takes the case of 'a land' not 'the land' (ver. 13, R.V.), an unnamed land which he compares in v. 21 with Jerusalem. Like Jerusalem it has sinned by committing a trespass. What intercessors then are to be expected to intercede with JEHOVAH for this land which is not Israel? Jeremiah living in Palestine and desiring intercessors for Judah, pronounces the names of two great heroes of Hebrew History—Moses and Samuel (Jer. xv 1). But Ezekiel banished to the land of the Chaldeans mentions as possible intercessors three men who are rather citizens of the World, Noah of the Flood Story (common to Israel and Babylon); Daniel chief of the wise men of Babylon (Dan. ii 48); and Job the man of Uz.

1. Professor Torrey is particularly positive in asserting that the bulk of the prophecy contained in Ezek. i-vii is directly addressed to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. But the introductory words say something different: 'I send thee to the *children of Israel*' (ii 3); 'Go speak unto the *house of Israel*' (iii 1). 'Israel' in the book of Ezekiel is distinguished from 'Judah'; e.g. in xxvii 17, 'Judah and the land of Israel,¹ they were thy traffickers', and in xxxvii 19, 'I will take the stick of Joseph . . . and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them with it, even with the stick of Judah'. More often Ezekiel uses 'Israel' in a comprehensive sense to include both Israel and Judah, and so in xxxvii 21-28 'Israel' stands for the whole people of North and South whom Ezekiel sees in vision healed at last of the great schism and reunited as one kingdom under the house of David.

¹ καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, LXX.

In fact JEHOVAH's charge to Ezekiel to prophesy directly to the exiles is given quite clearly in Ezek. iii 4-11. In ver. 4 the words are, 'Son of man, go get thee unto *the house of Israel*, and speak with my words unto them'. JEHOVAH singles out from the mixed population of Babylonia, mixed through many successive invasions and captivities, just those who belong to 'the house of Israel'. Contrast the words (spoken in Jerusalem) of Isaiah's commission, 'Go and tell *this people*'—here is no need to specify the people by name (Isa. vi 9).

In ver. 5 the emphasis is laid on the same point as in ver. 4, 'Thou art *not* sent to a people of strange speech'. Ezekiel in the land of the Chaldeans had Gentiles all around him, who spoke a strange, *difficult*, speech unlike the Hebrew or the familiar Aramaic dialects of Syria. To these he was *not* sent.

Finally, in ver. 11 come the unmistakeable words, 'Go, get thee to them of the captivity, the *gōlāh* (גֹּלְיָהּ לָא, *eis tēn aichmalōsian*), unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them'. The only way to get rid of the evidence of this passage is to assign the decisive words to the redactor who (*ex hypothesis*) transferred Ezekiel's ministry from Judaea to a land of exile.

A good many excisions of tell-tale words would have to be made if Professor Torrey's thesis is to escape contradiction from the rest of Ezekiel. Such is the case with the following passages:

(1) Then came I to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river Chebar: iii 15.

(2) The glory which I saw by the river Chebar: iii 23.

(3) The spirit brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem: viii 3.

(4) The living creature that I saw by the river Chebar: x 15.

(5) Then I spake unto them of the captivity (גֹּלְיָהּ לָא) all the things that JEHOVAH had shewed me: xi 25.

(6) Son of man, set thy face *toward* Jerusalem: xxi 2.

(7) One that had escaped out of Jerusalem¹ came unto me saying The city is smitten: xxxiii 21.

Professor Torrey says rather easily that such passages were inserted by the redactor of the book, who wished (contrary to fact!) to represent that the book came from Chaldaeae. But the variety and the naturalness of these references tell strongly for their genuineness. 'Tel-abib' and 'the river Chebar' are not the place-names an interpolator would use who was anxious to assert that the prophecy was spoken in Babylon. They are not well enough known. These two names—Tel-abib *and* the river Chebar—are in fact found in O.T. in *Ezekiel* only.

2. The Vision with which the book of Ezekiel opens has a Chaldean

¹ Or, The fugitives from Jerusalem.

and not a Judaeen background. The chariot of JEHOVAH comes from the North. Why from the North? The question is easy to answer, if Ezekiel is dwelling in the land of the Chaldeans, i.e. in the far South. In the language of the Old Testament the seat of JEHOVAH is *either* in Zion (Ps. l 2) *or* in some place to the South or South-east—Sinai or Seir (Deut. xxxiii 2; Judg. v 4, 5), Horeb (I Kings xix 8), Teman (Hab. iii 3). So to a watcher in Judaea JEHOVAH would come from the South or South-east. But to Ezekiel in Chaldaea the Vision would come, whether from Seir or from Zion, as travellers and as armies came, *via* the upper reaches of the Euphrates, that is, from the North.

Again the 'living creatures' of the Vision were the reflexions of certain common objects of sight in Babylonia and Assyria; they did not belong to Judaea. The colossi, man-headed, lion-headed, bull-headed, eagle-headed (Ezek. i 10) stood in stone in the gateways of the palaces and temples of the Euphrates valley. 'And their feet were straight feet', Ezekiel writes, as though his eyes were fixed on one of these monsters (i 7). On the other hand, we note that in Ps. xviii 10 (11) which belongs to a purely Judaeen vision, no description of the cherub is attempted: the words are simply: 'he rode upon a cherub and did fly.'

3. Professor Torrey has not done justice to a characteristic description used by Ezekiel of his own country. Why does the prophet so frequently say, '*the mountains of Israel*', when he might more naturally say '*the land of Israel*'? Ezekiel uses the term fifteen times (vi 2, 3, *al.*), but it is hardly found elsewhere in the Old Testament. But is it not a natural, almost inevitable phrase in the mouth of an exile who had known the mountains of his native land, but now was living on the featureless Babylonian plain?

And even the colourless phrase, '*the land of Israel*', contains a suggestion that the prophet was not living in Palestine, when he prophesied. Ezekiel gives 'land of Israel' in vii 2; xi 17; xiii 9; xviii 2; xxxiii 24; xl 2; *al.*, like one who contemplates Palestine from the outside, whereas Jeremiah, whose ministry was exercised in Jerusalem, has 'this land' (Jer. xiv 15; *al.*) eighteen times.

4. Again, when we examine the books of Isaiah 'of Jerusalem' and Jeremiah of Anathoth we find many references in detail to the topography of Jerusalem and the neighbourhood. Isaiah meets Ahaz 'at the end of the conduit of the upper pool' (Isa. vii 3); he is familiar with 'the waters of Shiloah, that go softly' (viii 6); he knows the towns and villages north of Jerusalem, Aiath, Ramah, Gibeah, and others (x 28-31); he has looked down on the harvest fields of Rephaim (xvii 5); he watched the making of a *reservoir between the two walls* of Jerusalem to receive the water of *the old pool* (xxii 11). But in Ezekiel there are

no local touches to match these. Jeremiah again reveals to us that he is walking in and about Jerusalem amid familiar scenes. 'Flee for safety, ye children of Benjamin, out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise up a signal on Beth-haccherem' (Jer. vi 1). In xviii 1, 2 Jeremiah is bidden, *Go down to the potter's house* (בֵּית הַיִּצָר) or rather, 'to the place of the potters', for בֵּית הַיִּצָר is a collective. We remember that there was a district in Judah known as the dwelling place of the potters (1 Chron. iv 23), and to this no doubt Jeremiah refers. In xix 2 there is mention of 'the gate Harsith' as one of the gates of Jerusalem, perhaps 'the gate of potsherds' leading to the dwellings of the potters. In xxvi 10 (cf. xxxvi 10) the princes of Judah sit in the entry of the 'New Gate of the House of JEHOVAH'.

Local touches like these which are cited from Jeremiah cannot be paralleled from Ezekiel except in the case of references to the temple and its immediate surroundings (see Ezek. viii 3, 14; x 19; xi 23), but a priest, an Ezekiel, might well remember temple details when far away from Jerusalem. They do not prove that he wrote in actual contemplation of the Temple of which he was once a minister.

5. Again there is a difference between the references made to child sacrifice in Jeremiah and those found in Ezekiel which suggests that Ezekiel was not (as Jeremiah) prophesying in Jerusalem. Jeremiah fiercely denounces Topheth in the valley of the son of Hinnom confronting Jerusalem (2 Kings xxiii 10) where these sacrifices were perpetrated: Jer. vii 30-32; xix 11-14. Ezekiel is equally indignant against the practice, but there is no local touch in his denunciations; unlike Jeremiah he had not before his eyes the high place of Molech facing the temple of JEHOVAH. Surely the sphere of Ezekiel's ministry was not 'Judah and Jerusalem'.

6. Once more. In vi 2 Ezekiel is directed to 'set his face toward the mountains of Israel'. Plainly the phrase implies that the prophet was at the time at a distance from 'the mountains (the land) of Israel', just as in xxv 2 'Set thy face toward the children of Ammon' supposes that the prophet is outside the territory of Ammon.

7. There is yet another striking difference between 'Jeremiah' and 'Ezekiel' which supports the view that the scene of Ezekiel's ministry was outside Palestine. In 'Jeremiah' the references to priests are numerous (usually unfavourable): see ii 8, 26; iv 9; v 31; viii 1, 10; xiii 13; xix 1; *al.* This is what we should expect. In Judah and especially in Jerusalem it would be impossible for a prophet to avoid all touch with them, friendly or unfriendly, for there they were the official representatives of religion. This would be equally true of the third century B.C. as of the sixth. But in a possibly small settlement (Tel-abib) of captives in Babylonia there was probably no priest at all except

Ezekiel himself. And accordingly we find in Ezek. i-xxxix no more than one reference and that in general terms to Jewish priests: in xxii 26 JEHOVAH declares, 'Her priests have done violence to my law, and have profaned mine holy things'. In Ezek. xl-xlviii which gives the programmes of the New Jerusalem and the restored Temple there are of course many references to priests and priesthood, but the best explanation of the 'priestlessness' of Ezek. i-xxxix is that 'Ezekiel's' commission was executed far from Jerusalem and its temple.

8. The fact that Ezekiel is intensely interested in the fate of Jerusalem (as in Ezek. iv, v), and further that he expects his hearers to be similarly interested, is no proof that the prophet was prophesying in Jerusalem itself or in its immediate neighbourhood. As long as the temple stood and the city was not laid waste the hopes of the Jews, whether in Palestine or in any land of exile, must have centred in their sanctuary and in their Strong City. Before the beginning of the Exile they pointed up at the temple buildings in pride and confidence, and they said in the ears of Jeremiah, 'These buildings are the temple of JEHOVAH, the temple of JEHOVAH . . .' (Jer. vii 4). And the letter of Jeremiah addressed to the first band of exiles (Jer. xxix 1-7) should be enough to prove—if proof be necessary—that the hopes of the exiles among whom Ezekiel lived still harked back to Jerusalem. The fate of Jerusalem and of the temple was of keenest interest to them. If Ezekiel wished to gain their ear, he was bound to touch upon the fate of the City from which they were separated and to which they longed to return.

And so Ezekiel took a tile (a mud brick) and scratched upon it the outline of a city, and declared to the onlookers that the city was Jerusalem (Ezek. iv 1). The city itself was far off, the prophet could not point to it, so this poor presentment on a Babylonian brick must serve as Ezekiel's picture to illustrate his discourse.

Professor Torrey has surely taken up an indefensible historical position. He opposes his own estimate of probabilities to an amount of documentary evidence which should be too strong for him. The existence in Babylonia of a *Golah* consisting of a group or a number of groups of Jewish exiles who retained through the troubles of the sixth century B.C. their attachment to Jerusalem and the Temple mount is attested not only in the 'present book' of Ezekiel, but also in Jeremiah, in Deutero-Isaiah, and in Zechariah i-viii. Professor Torrey supports one denial by another, for he has already denied the date assigned by most scholars to Isa. xl-xlvi. I do not think that he will find many to agree with him in his denial of the existence of the *Golah* and of the Ministry of Ezekiel in Babylonia in the sixth century B.C.

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