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Ezekiel: an Exiled Prophet

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EZEKIEL

an Exiled Prophet

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. (Ezekiel 3:17.)

Ezekiel was an exile. He knew what it was to abandon home and homeland forever and become one of an expendable class of humans subjected to the will, the wiles, and the dominion of human overlords.

Before captivity and exile (about 597 B.C.), he had lived through part of the decline and decay of his nation's religion, morals, and politics. It may well be that he saw as a youth the last attempt by the government to ward off disaster, at the time when the book of the Law of Moses was found in the temple, in the days of good king Josiah, and a great religious revival was undertaken. But subsequently he saw the abandon with which people and priests, kings and counselors forsook the ways of the Lord to return to the ways of the heathen — and the ways of their sister tribes of northern Israel, whose decadence resulted in their being conquered and lost a hundred years before, in the time of the prophet Isaiah. (See *Ezekiel* 11:12 and chapter 23 for his lessons drawn from history.)

Ezekiel was probably taken into Babylon when young king Jehoiachin was taken, along with courtiers, princes, mighty men, craftsmen and smiths and all but the poorest sort of people of the land. (See *II Kings* 24:12-16.) Deep in the land of Mesopotamia, by the channels of Chebar, the exiles were transplanted; and he saw them weep by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion. (See *Psalms* 137:1.) There the call of the Lord came to him; and in three visions of symbols showing forth the powers of God, he was instructed and commissioned to speak for the Lord:

And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day . . . And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. (Ezekiel 2:2, 3, 5.)

But the people of his time, like the people of today, were reluctant to believe that that which they always had possessed could end just then or be destroyed. They kept thinking: "All is well; our days are prolonged and the prophecies and visions have not come to pass." But the Lord said to the remnant in Judah less than ten years before Jerusalem was destroyed, "...The days are at hand, . . .there shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, . . ." (Ezekiel 12:23, 28.) He compared Judah to Sodom, whose iniquity also had been pride, opulence, idleness, haughty sophistication and neglect of charity. They, too, had busied themselves with abominations before God. (See *Ezekiel* 16:46-50.) Because the remnant of the chosen people, who should have been showing wisdom and strength before the nations, did abominations in the dark, they were rejected. Because they listened not unto His prophets, but to lying reassurances of peace and security (see *Ezekiel* 13), the Lord departed from them, and His glory left the temple, and they were left unto themselves. (See *Ezekiel* 9:3ff.1; 10:18; 11:22-12:16. Compare this with a warning for our day in *Doctrine and Covenants* 63:32-35.)

Nonetheless, there was a future still for those who would repent and accept renewal of the Spirit by the Lord. (See *Ezekiel* 11:13-21.) Some would be brought back from Babylon in 70 years, as we know from the prophecies of others. (Compare *Jeremiah* 25:11, 12; 29:10; *Daniel* 9:2; fulfillment in *II Chronicles* 36:20-23.) But Ezekiel gave those of his generation little hope of getting back to things as they had been. Meanwhile, they were not to sit and lament their fate, but to make the

best of it, even as Ezekiel set the example. As a symbol unto them, he was told not even to lament the death of his wife, "the desire of his eyes," when she was taken, for she could not be brought back. (*Ezekiel* 24:15ff.) Neither would the old life in Jerusalem return. Moreover, they were not to blame their fathers or others for their sad lot, but each was to seek to better his own state. Whosoever would repent and be just, doing that which is lawful and right, walking in the Lord's statutes, dealing truly with his fellows, "he shall surely live, saith the Lord God." In a pronouncement not unlike our own *Second Article of Faith*, the prophet said:

*Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? . . .The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? (Ezekiel 18:19-23. See the whole chapter, and compare similar teaching through Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants* 58:42, 43; or 19:16ff. Recall also *Isaiah* 1:16-19.)*

For the distant latter day, Ezekiel foresaw a great destiny for Israel and for all the earth, in a day when all should know that the Lord is God of all. Like the other prophets, he saw the gathering of Israel and the establishment of the kingdom and the king of David's line. (See *Ezekiel* 20:34ff.; 34:23; 37:21, 22, 24, 28). He saw the dead resurrected to be gathered with the rest. (See *Ezekiel* 37:12-14.) As the scattered of Israel would be united again, so also would their writings be brought together in one testimony. (See *Ezekiel* 37:16, 17; see also 2 *Nephi* 29:12, 13.) He saw the destruction of the nations who combine to try to overcome the restored nation of Israel. (See *Ezekiel* 38:2-39:7.) He describes in detail the restored temple to be built in Jerusalem (see *Ezekiel* 40-48) and tells of the gate of it through which the Lord, the God of Israel, would enter. (See *Ezekiel* 44:2; compare with Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*; page 286.)

Yes, Ezekiel was an exile, and he knew what it was to suffer. He also knew how to endure it well and tells us clearly that those who do endure and are faithful to the end, in his day or in ours, shall be restored and established in the Lord's kingdom.

—Ellis T. Rasmussen.

1 Abbreviation for "following" verses.



THE PICTURE

This scene by Eugene Spiro portrays Ezekiel in his role as “. . . a sign unto the house of Israel.” (*Ezekiel* 12:6.)

The captive Israelites were hardhearted, but they knew Ezekiel was a prophet. He had their attention, and here he is arousing their curiosity with apparently strange behavior. He had gathered his things, dug through the wall, and carried them out, with his face covered, to another place.

In doing this he was following divine instructions, which produced effective results: the Israelites were moved to ask the prophet what he was doing. This gave him a better opportunity to deliver a message from the Lord, beginning with: “. . . This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them.” (*Ezekiel* 12:10. Also see the rest of this chapter from the beginning through verse 16.)

Perhaps Ezekiel's most significant statement to the Lord's people in our day as well as in his time was this: “I am your sign: . . .” (*Ezekiel* 12:11.)

—Virgil B. Smith.