

Prophecy Spiritually Understood - Pt 4 'Ezekiel and His Brethren'

by Charles Alexander

This sermon explores the spiritual depth of Ezekiel's prophecies, emphasizing the distinction between literal interpretations and the profound truths they reveal about God's covenant with His people.

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1, Matthew 13:10, John 4:21, John 10:27, Romans 11:26, 2 Corinthians 3:3, Galatians 6:16, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Spiritual Prophecy", "Church Restoration"

Description

Charles Alexander preaches about the impoverishment the Church has suffered through literalizing theories in the treatment of Ezekiel's prophecies, emphasizing the need to understand the spiritual treasures and wonders of the prophets rather than reducing prophecy to dry bones. He highlights the importance of recognizing the spiritual significance and fulfillment of Ezekiel's visions in Christ, revealing the eternal truths and mysteries hidden within the prophecies. Charles challenges the incompetence of evangelical pulpit exposition and encourages a deeper, spiritual understanding of Ezekiel's prophecies, pointing to the spiritual restoration and fulfillment in the Church of Jew and gentile as the true Israel of God.

Transcript

The impoverishment the Church has suffered through sterile prophetic theories is nowhere more marked than in the treatment measured out in pulpit and press to the prophecies of Ezekiel. These arid theories have robbed Scriptures of their majesty and wonder and reduced prophecy to a body skeleton much like Ezekiel's valley of bones before the breath of the Spirit came - very many and very dry.

The incompetence of the evangelical pulpit today in the field of exposition derives largely from these literalizing theories, the usual mark of which is the wholesale assembling of texts under convenient headings, with no serious attempt at exposition. To mistake this method for exegesis is one of the wonders of the age.

The enthusiasm which brings together every conceivable Old Testament text under the heading, "Jewish Restoration to Palestine" commends itself to a public which has never really heard, or been permitted to hear, the majestic unfolding of the spiritual treasures of the prophets. There is no popular market for the serious expositor that endeavors to reach the mind and the heart of the ordinary believer. The occasional

bookwork of noted theologians who are labeled "Amillennialist" is designed for the student and has only a marginal interest for the general reader.

Hence the task to which we have set ourselves in this series of papers is peculiarly onerous. No-one is likely to undertake the publication of OUR books, for they are not intended to rate in the category of those productions which circulate chiefly in the sacred cloisters of the scholastic community, while on the other hand the absence of a popular market does not encourage the modern publisher to risk his money in the attempt to educate and edify the ordinary Christian.

Falling between these two stools, we endeavor by the grace of God to attain our goal by our own resources, supported by the generosity of those friends all over the world who, with the same sense of the paralysis which has overtaken evangelical preaching, encourage us to do and dare. Our private mailing list grows apace. Our cost mount - and are met, by the grace of God. Withdrawals are few. Criticism is negligible, and for the most part puerile. We discover a hunger for the heavenly manna of the Word among ordinary Christians not otherwise catered for. We are also impelled to the task by information coming to us from all over our once favored land, for a FAMINE OF THE WORD OF GOD, so dire and so prevailing that many believers know not where to go to obtain a ministry of the Word which satisfies and edifies.

"JEWS ONLY ADMITTED"

If in the course of our studies in this series we have occasion to turn aside to notice the fallacious interpretations of others, readers will understand we do so not out of love of controversy but out of concern for the flock of the Christ who find their green pastures and still waters locked up against with

"JEWS ONLY ADMITTED" posted up on the fence. It will be our solemn duty to tear down their fences and demolish their notice boards, so that the hungry may have access and be fed.

The good Lord judge between us, and between our exposition and their dry bones as we proceed to the task of opening up the treasury of Ezekiel, the seraphic prophet whose name signifies "The power of God", and whose remarkable title, "Son of Man" shows in whose name he acts by whose Spirit he is imbued. For Ezekiel's name denotes Christ, "The power of God and the wisdom of God"

(1 Cor. 1:24) - which is another way of expressing John's glorious and mystic revelation of Christ as the "Logos" the eternal Word of God, power, wisdom, presence, light, truth, and glorious image (John 1:1).

Nowhere did Ezekiel act or speak just for himself. In all things he was the voice of Christ speaking from eternity and speaking down the ages of history. Begin there and we begin well.

Here in Ezekiel's book we behold the planned wonders of prophetic time revealed by that God who orders the end from the beginning and proves by His foreknowledge of the future that all events of history are His, as He moves in majestic authority through the ages and brings all to the predestined end of Redemptive triumph.

"God foreknows because He predestinates", thunders Luther.

Ezekiel's prophecy takes the form of a sevenfold revelation moving in orderly sequence from the first vision on the banks of the river Chebar, in Babylon, to the final graphic revelation of the spiritual Temple raised in his vision to take the place of the one destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

The seven visions of Ezekiel are all dated in their opening verse to mark the exact place occupied on the calendar as the prophecy moves to its climax.

Beginning on that 'fifth day of the fourth month of king Jehoiakin's captivity' (chapter 1:1-2) the prophecy moves with iron, relentless feet through four clearly marked cycles, until the time of the divine forbearance expires in the awful cry, "the city is smitten" (33:21).

There is inserted in chapters 24 to 33, verse 20, a series of separate prophecies relating largely to the fate of the heathen nations surrounding Israel, uttered at various times and gathered by the prophet into their own independent section.

The fall of Jerusalem, which took place in the eleventh year of Ezekiel's exile in Babylon, is the signal in his prophecy for the beginning of the two great visions of comfort, the first (33:21 to the end chapter 39) foretelling the gospel grace to be expected on the advent of the Messiah, and the second, the vision of the new Temple with its mystic waters of eternal life and its portrayal of the New Testament mediatorship of Christ, occupying the concluding chapters, 40-48. The cry, "The Lord is there", fittingly closes the entire book, in contrast with the earlier cry, "The city is smitten."

Sterile prophetism sees in Ezekiel's final vision only another temple of stone and lime, with busy priests carrying the blood, hides and bones of sacrificial beasts. Judge between us, O Lord.

SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK

A convenient synopsis of Ezekiel would display itself somewhat in the following form, arranged around the significant dates of the visions in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the 11th year of Jehoiakin's captivity:

The First Vision of the Cherubim and the coming destruction of the city.

(Chapters 1-7. Date: the fifth year, fourth month and fifth day).

The Second Vision, showing the sins for which the judgment was inevitable, the sealing of the elect, and the introduction of the New Covenant.

(Chapters 8-19. Date: 6th year, 6th month 5th day).

The Third Vision, showing the inevitable nature of the judgment impending and the awful sins of the nation demanding that judgment.

(Chapters 20-23. Date: 7th year, 5th month, 10th day).

The Fourth Vision, a single chapter (24) arising from the date of the vision which coincided with the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem in the 9th year, the 10th month, and the 10th day.

The Fifth (cycle) of Visions, various dates, relating to the heathen nations

(Chapter 25 to chapter 33, verse 20)

The Sixth Vision, consolatory, following the disaster of the siege, promising the Messianic gospel grace. (Chapters 33:21 to 39.

Date: 12th year, 10th month, 5th day).

The Seventh Vision, the New Testament Temple.

(Chapters 40-48. Date: 25th year, 1st month, 10th day).

Ezekiel's ministry begins on the banks of the Chebar, a tributary of the Euphrates, where he had been transported as one of the first exiles eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The day has much to do with the understanding of his prophecy. He was a priest of the Temple who had never been permitted to begin his Temple service. For this was the 30th year of his life (Chapter 1, v.1), his ordination year, when those born to the priesthood entered upon their priestly life. The vision of the cherubim so vividly described in the opening chapters, in that innermost glory of the earthly sanctuary within the veil, where stood the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy-seat and the overshadowing wings of the golden cherubs.

The date on the calendar - the fifth year of the Jehoiakin's captivity - shows the time is getting short. Only six years now remain before the doomed city will be stormed and destroyed by that instrument of divine providence, King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian conqueror.

It is with Ezekiel's second "day" that we have more particularly to do at this stage. This cycle extends from chapter 8 to chapter 19. Another year has gone by (see 8.1). Five years remain before the disaster. We refer our reader to chapter 11 in this section, as this chapter is a favourite with our literalist brethren, but we hope to prove that they have not even begun to understand it.

The second part of chapter 11 is taken up with a promise of the New Covenant of grace, which our friends interpret as an exclusive promise to earthly Israel. What they fail to notice is that the section begins with verse 13 and not with verse 17.

Verse 13 records the sudden death of Pelatiah, one of the leaders of the Jerusalem apostasy. He typifies the entire nation, as Ezekiel indicates in his prayer, "Ah Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel."

God's answer to this cry begins in a remarkable statement in verse 15, which we quote:

"Son of men, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in possession."

THE TWO ISRAELS

Now this verse cannot be understood unless we put ourselves in Ezekiel's shoes. There were TWO ISRAELS in Ezekiel's prophecy, the one at Jerusalem and the other in Babylon. The latter, which included Ezekiel, was the earlier transportation which preceded by eleven years the final destruction of the nation. The elite of Jerusalem had been removed - the princes, nobles, craftsmen, and smiths. Those left behind under the puppet king Zedekiah (sworn by Nebuchadnezzar to do what he was told) enjoyed unexpected tranquility. The captives in Babylon languished. Those at home were without a care except for the pulverizing invective of the prophet Jeremiah who thundered of judgment to come: but who paid any attention to him?

These Jerusalem people were very secure in their delusions. They were also very wicked and gross in their sins. Their correspondence with their exiled brethren was lofty and proud. They regarded the exiles with contempt.

"You are rejected by God" was what they said; "You are banished from Israel and this land is no more your possession. All is given to us, including the patrimony you have left behind..."

These crushing words and slanderous insinuations had to be born without hope of redress by the exiles.

It was then that the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel - a word so startling and devastating that to this day it is barely understood by our best theologians. Ezekiel is addressed as "Son of man" - a designation which belongs exclusively to the Saviour in whose name Ezekiel acts.

We begin there. It is the Father who is addressing the Son through the Eternal Spirit. Ezekiel fades from view. Christ appears in his place. Eternal words, the words which form the terms of the Everlasting Covenant of Redemption, are uttered. Judah and Chaldea fade from view. These are only the drapery; the shadows. The substance is the Covenant.

"Son of man - these are thy brethren - these whom Jerusalem rejects in contempt - these who are captive and exiled in a far country - these are thy kindred, thou Son of Man - these are the true and only House of Israel - these are all the house of Israel wholly."

Do we not hear, brethren, what the prophet is saying - or rather what the Father is saying to the Son through the lips of the prophet? He is saying what Paul long after, speaking by the same prophetic Spirit declared, "And so all Israel shall be saved...." (Romans 11:26). These are the two Israel's - those whom earthly Israel rejects in her pride and loftiness as she regards herself even in her sinful apostasy, as the only true Israel and heir to the promises; and the other Israel, the spiritual, the Israel of redemption, thy brethren O Christ, the men of thy kindred, O Emmanuel - "all the house of Israel wholly", "All Israel", as Paul describes the elect.

Consider, dear reader, the import of these words "brethren" and "kindred". The brethren of Christ are the election of grace, the redeemed: "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause HE IS NOT ASHAMED TO CALL THEM BRETHREN" (Hebrews 2:11).

Paul goes further and tells us that here is a picture, not of natural Israel but of the Church of the Redeemed. He proceeds, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee". (Hebrews 2:12)

There is the grand spectacle, beloved - Christ standing in the midst of His elect brethren, leading their praise as they raise the song of redemption, the Song of Moses and the Lamb, the new song which David exhorted the people of God to sing (Psalm 98:1).

These are "the men of thy kindred" O Christ. Thou blest Son of Man, behold them, given to thee by the Father in the terms of the Everlasting Covenant before the foundation of the world - thy kinsmen by thine own redeeming blood - they whom thou has an eternal right to redeem, for they are thy property, though taken captive by the enemy, and spoken against by those false brethren who suppose that the inheritance is theirs; they are thine, and shall be thine, in that day when thou makes up thy jewels.

Let these words be dwelt upon; "brethren" and "kindred" - for in them the secret of redemption and the key to Scripture is found.

Now the Jews of the exile in Ezekiel's day were not in fact believers any more than those left behind in Jerusalem. Their elders assembled at the prophet's house in Chaldea, and the word of the Lord declared to Ezekiel, "These men have set up their idols in their heart and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?" (Chapter 14:2). They enjoyed the sensation of hearing a man who was speaking in a prophetic ecstasy, as one might listen to a grand oratory, but completely indifferent to the words: "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not". (Ezekiel 33:32)

Even the exiles therefore, were only the shadow or the faint representation of the believing remnant, and Ezekiel was not speaking for them and for his own time, but Christ was speaking through him of the time to come, taking from the present the contemporary drapery, and presenting His Church in all the timeless mystery of a redemption which is not only eternal but, of necessity, particular.

Ezekiel's day fades and drops from view. The curtain rises. An eternal drama is being enacted. Coming into view is the whole election of grace, "The house of Israel wholly" - "all Israel" - and Paul and Ezekiel are one in their vision and Christ and the Church are the object of all prophecy, the mystic Israel, the true Children of Abraham, the people of the Eternal Covenant.

He who does not see this sees nothing yet as he ought to see, and cannot interpret or expound the Word of God.

The remainder of Ezekiel's 11th chapter is based upon the situation of verse 13. It is of this Israel that the prophetic word goes on to say that God will be their sanctuary in all lands though there be no more a temple at Jerusalem (v.16). These are the people scattered and then gathered; the land of Israel given to them is not an earthly country any more than their city is the earthly Zion. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven....." (Hebrews 12:22-23). The land is the heavenly country of which Palestine is only the figure, just as the brethren of Christ were not those religious hypocrites whether in Jerusalem or in Chaldea, but those who were foreshadowed by those exiles.

And here, dear reader, are the blessings of the New Covenant displayed: a new heart, a new spirit, the stony heart removed and the heart of flesh bestowed - the feeling, responsive heart; the power within of prevailing and persevering grace to cause us to walk in His statutes; that we may be His people and He shall be our God (verses 19-29).

Let not dare to take that scripture from us, or allow us only a proxy interest therein after the Jew has been fully served. Here is neither Jew nor gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free - all are one in Christ Jesus.

BONES, BONES, BONES

Across all this Mr. Wilbur Smith in his book "Arab/Israel Conflict and the Bible" writes, "Ezekiel reiterates the Lord's promise that Israel will be restored to the land of her fathers". Just that and no more. Mr. Smith can say no more - no exposition, no glory, no ecstasy, no holy and spiritual light; just some earthly tribes

going back to an ancient territory. Here is the bankruptcy of literalism which takes all the wonder out of the Word of God, and leaves nothing but bones - very many and very dry.

But greater wonders wait upon us as we turn from such bony comments and take in at a glance the entire range of Ezekiel's ministry from that first moment by the river Chebar.

Here is our prophet, the man whose name means "the logos, the eternal Word" - "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God". He sits sadly that first day of his prophetic life, by the waters of Babylon, his harp hung upon the willows, weeping as he remembers Zion. For that day was his birthday. He was thirty years old (Ezekiel 1:1). He was born to be a priest (verse 3) and the priest entered upon his temple ministry in Israel at the age of thirty (Numbers 4:3). But Ezekiel was an exile, and deprived of the honour of his birth. Instead of entering the temple he was by the river Chebar, a mourning captive.

But, though he knew it not, that day was to be the day of his spiritual ecstasy. The glory of God came to him where he sat. The temple in its true significance opened its gates to him. He found himself inside the veil, in the innermost sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. That which the earthly temple only signified came to him in its unearthly, spiritual reality.

Instead of the wooden furniture of the sanctuary with its overlay of yellow gold, the true sanctuary came in all its living glory and spiritual meaning and power. Instead of the darkened interior and the flickering candelabra there was the roll of eternal thunder and vivid lighting flash from the throne of God. The whole creation blazed with the light of the glory of the Lord.

Fade, temple; sink into oblivion, earthly sanctuary. Rend that veil. Tear down these curtains with their cunning embroidery. Carry away that flickering candlestick. It will be needed no more. Abolish types and shadows. Here is reality - all that the old Mosaic order was only designed to prefigure, and having introduced must be banished forever. Begone, golden cherubim, with thy gilded but flightless wings; thy place is taken by that living power which upholds the eternal throne. Let the stony table of the Law be lost forever as their golden ark is cast away into the contemptible rubbish heap of history. Though the lettering of the Ten Commands was etched by the finger of God Himself, He has found another and more congenial medium upon which to write the formula of His own righteousness - the fleshy tables of the heart, the renewed, regenerate hearts of His redeemed and elected people (2 Cor. 3:3).

But only for Israel, mark you! Say our opponents. Of course, just for Israel, no-one else, - so long as that Israel is the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) - Ezekiel's Israel, the Israel disowned by the earthly Jerusalem, the rejected, despised Israel, brought from the exile and blight of sin, and the banishment and curse of the broken covenant of Works. This is the Israel which is delivered by the true Seed of the Woman who by His own death and wondrous passion has bruised the head of the Serpent's Kingdom and crushed and destroyed him who had the dominion of death.

Let Ezekiel himself fade from view and in his place appear that great Mediator and Advocate, the true Son of Man, Emmanuel the Prince of heave, whose Spirit even then was awaking the soul of the young prophet.

So, Ezekiel, thou art a priest this day after all - a priest of the living Temple. Thou heavenly Ezekiel! Priest forever after the order of Melchizedec!

As God gave thee in vision, O Ezekiel, by the waters of Chebar, a temple in which to worship, where thou mightest be priest even though thou must never bear the blood of the sacrifices in the earthly sanctuary - so God giveth to Him whom thy name signifies, another Temple, a heavenly, the Temple of His own glorious body risen from the dead (John 2:21) where He alone is Prophet, Priest and King and in which He ever lives to make intercession for His own - whereby He is able to save to the uttermost those who came unto God by Him (Hebrews 7:25).

Ezekiel, thou didst see that Temple too, away there in the vision which came to thee in Chaldea. Thou didst describe its dimensions and show to the house of Israel the pattern of it, and though earthly minded men run after thee with line and compass, with square and chisel, to set as architects and present the design of thy visionary temple as though it were such another of stone and lime as that very vision of thine didst abolish for ever - though thy evangelical literalizers invented in the year 1968 stories of masonry being assembled at New York piers, all marked and hewn and ready for fitment on arrival at Palestine to construct a Temple for Him who said long ago that He was the Temple and needed no other - though the fraud be detected and inquiries made and it be discovered there is no such pier in New York, no such vessel chartered, and no such stone for cargo; though all this be the case, fear not thou misused and misunderstood prophet. Events will surely expose the inventions of those who cannot perceive the sanctifying, evangelical nature of thy ministry.

A TEMPLE NOT MADE WITH HANDS

The dimensions of the temple which Ezekiel describes in his last chapters are spiritual dimensions - that is, they are descriptions of a state of holiness different by worlds from that of any earthly temple which ever was or can be. This is made plain in Ezek. 43:1-12, where the prophet's temple becomes the seat of God's eternal throne, and the Most Holy place extends to the entire mountain on which the temple is built.

But the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands. Whose, then, is the unhallowed hand which will tear out of the Bible that sentence of our Lord's, "Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father, but the true worshippers shall worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24; Acts 17:24)? Ezekiel's mountain is not the Moriah at Jerusalem now capped by a Moslem mosque but the Kingdom of Christ, the Mount Zion of Hebrews 12:22.

Poor Ezekiel! They did not understand thee in thine own day. And even today there are those who are truly converted yet are busy with their instruments measuring that which only angels can measure and place that which is spiritual fairly and squarely on a mount which is material.

They are like the misguided man who recently cast fire into Omar's Mosque on that old temple mount at Jerusalem, thinking that by doing so he would hasten the Second Coming of Christ because (according to false theories) Christ cannot return to earth till there is a house built to receive Him! As though He who IS the temple will ever reduce Himself to these contemptible human dimensions and reconcile Himself to the vast contradiction and evangelical blasphemy of a new priesthood and a fresh range of animal sacrifices offered in His very presence who dies within sight of that spot to put all that away for ever.

O Ezekiel, from our obscurity here at the last tag-end of time, we try to expose these errors in order that the spiritual message of life eternal thou was commissioned to proclaim, might not be obscured by the heavy darkness now poured upon thy words in a constant stream from press and pulpit. We repel the notion the temple veil, which Christ rent in twain by His reconciling death, should be hung up again in even more permanent form.

That, O son of man, was not the intention of the Holy Spirit within thee. We will contend against that blasphemy while there is breath left in our body, and God helping us we will cry havoc! Till our beloved evangelicalism is roused from its delusions and returns to those expansive Biblical dimensions from which Satan has striven so long to exclude us.

THE TWO VILE SISTERS

It is now the seventh year of Jehoiakin's captivity (Chapter 20, verse 1). The third cycle of the prophecy dawns. Only four years remain to the deluded people of Jerusalem. This third cycle is a day of unmitigated gloom. The full extent of Israel's apostasy is disclosed. The ministry of Jeremiah back home in Palestine and that of Ezekiel in Chaldea do not stem the tide of iniquity. There is no longer anyone to stand in the gap and "Make up the hedge" so that God might not destroy the nation (22:30-31). Iniquity has come to the full, and under the figure of the two harlots, Aholah and Aholibamah (Samaria and Jerusalem), the disgusting nature of the spiritual whoredom of the nation is exhibited (chapter 23). There is in the name of these two vile sisters a peculiarly heinous association, for the names are taken from the Hebrew for "tent" used to describe the sacred Tabernacle set up by Moses in the wilderness. Thus the holy is defiled by Israel, and the crowning blasphemy is enacted. There is a corresponding blasphemy to this in the Christian era. Let our ecumenicalists look to it and see what lies at the end of their road.

The wicked prince of Israel is personally addressed. He is Zedekiah. His day is come. Iniquity is to 'have an end'. "Remove the diadem" says the Lord, "take off the crown.... I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: it shall be no more, until HE COMES WHOSE RIGHT IT IS; AND I WILL GIVE IT TO HIM" (21:25-27). This is a clear prophecy that David's house is about to fall, and would not be restored until the Lord Himself come in great humility to be born at Bethlehem, and to mount the eternal throne by way of the Cross.

JEHOVAH'S WIFE DIES

The third prophetic day ends with chapter 23. It is now the ninth year, the tenth month and the tenth day of the month. (24:1). Ezekiel is commissioned to make a special note of the day, which not only makes the fourth cycle of his visions, but is the very day when the campaign opened which was to end with the destruction of the city and nation two years later. (Chapter 24:2) It is a short cycle of only one chapter, but the tragedy is complete. In it Ezekiel's wife dies, as a symbol of the death of Israel, the wife of Jehovah (24:18). Ezekiel is forbidden to weep, for Jerusalem is rejected and divorced, and her place will taken by another Jerusalem - the heavenly bride of Christ.

God will profane His sanctuary and remove the 'desire of their eyes' (v. 21). Ezekiel will be dumb, as a sign that God no more speaks to the nation; he will be dumb until "he that is escaped" appears, and to him the prophet will speak. That is, there will be no word any more for the earthly people; a new and elect people will appear, the people of the New Covenant, escaped by grace from an ungodly world. To them the Word of God will be opened. (24:26-27)

This word is fulfilled typically in the sixth cycle of the prophecy (chapters 33:21 to the end of chapter 39). The fifth cycle, which for brevity we pass over, consists of predictions of the fall of the nations which surrounded Israel. These predictions were uttered at various times and were gathered by Ezekiel into a section of their own.

"THE CITY IS SMITTEN"

Chapter 33:21, which opens the sixth cycle (the 12th year, and the tenth month, 18 months after the fall of Jerusalem), is a remarkable verse which has given much trouble to the commentators who have not always perceived that prophetic time is not the same as ordinary historic time. Ezekiel must have known within days or at the outside, weeks, of the fall of Jerusalem, but here he records the arrival of one of the fugitives, "one that had escaped out of Jerusalem" who comes to him and cries, "The city is smitten", 18 months after the event.

How inconvenient to the commentators! They have tried in vain to explain how the news could not have taken that long to reach Ezekiel, and some have surmised that there is an error in the record - the common resort of commentators who are baffled. There is not error, brethren. This is prophetic time we are handling. Ezekiel knew all about the fall of the city, but his dumbness was not to be removed until the fugitive of the earlier prophecy should be due to arrive. Overnight Ezekiel's tongue was loosed, and in the morning the man arrived, anticipated by the release of the prophet from silence.

It was not fitting that immediately on the fall of the city what Ezekiel now had to say should be prematurely uttered. For what he NOW must prophesy belonged not to the nation which had been cast off, but to the elect remnant typified by the "one who had escaped out Jerusalem".

Who the man was is of no consequence. His late arrival on the scene was a prophetic act, not intended to be historically considered. He might have been in Chaldea for a twelve month, but this was the first time he encountered the prophet. Impelled by Spirit of prophecy he finds out the prophet at the appropriate moment and declares, "The city is smitten".

Oh woeful tidings! The means more than the historic announcement of Nebuchadnezzar storming of those walls. This is a divine judgment. The man declares that GOD has smitten the city, not man. The earthly Jerusalem passes away from the scene of prophetic enactment. The man speaks not for his own time (that is why he arrives so late in the day) but for the days of the Son of Man of whom Ezekiel was the representative.

In that moment the tongue of the prophet is unloosed. It is Christ who speaks in him, and Christ is unfolding the New Covenant of grace. The people would not listen to Ezekiel. "They sit before thee as my people and they hear thy words but will not do them" (verse 31). They crowd around the prophet as they crowded around the Saviour in a later day to hear Him speak who spake as never man spake - but their interest in the divine Word was only a pretence. "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, for they hear thy words but they do them not". (v. 32).

The empty pharisaism of Judaism is here exhibited. The Lord turns therefrom and prepares for that work which was ordained before the foundation of the world. To the earthly Israel He is dumb, for they will not hear. But the spiritual Israel will hear. Thy Kindred, O son of Man; thy brethren, all the house of Israel wholly, are these whom the earthly Jerusalem have thrust away. The Word of God is taken from the earthly people and given to an elect nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. These are thy brethren and thy kindred, O Son of Man.

And what of the rest? What of this earthly Israel with their leaders and rulers? These, says Christ are the hireling shepherds whose own the sheep are not.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

For Ezekiel's opened lips begin to pour forth a sweetness which earthly Israel never knew. The great sixth day of the prophetic cycle has dawned. The full revelation of the gospel is to be exhibited. Chapter 34 is the parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10) and Christ makes it His own. Read it, O believer, and read it now. Lay down this poor paper thou art now reading, and open the Word of God at the 34th of Ezekiel and read through without a break, then turn over the pages to the 10th of John and see there how Ezekiel and Christ are one in their testimony, how that the elect sheep were ill-treated by the Jewish shepherds - the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees with their proud national notions and "favored nation" boastings when all the time they thrust the Word of God far from them. No Jewish shepherds now, and no more of them for ever, for we now have the Good Shepherd, David the King (v.23) who feeds the flock and makes a New Covenant with them, even a Covenant of Peace; showers of blessing are theirs, they dwell safely in wilderness and wood, and fear no wild beast - for "ye my flock the flock of my pasture are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord of hosts". (v. 31)

"But this is a description of natural Israel restored to Palestine at the end of the Church era", declare our literalists.

Indeed! And why then should Christ have chosen to expound this very chapter of Ezekiel as referring to Himself as He stood in person before the Jewish people 2,000 years ago and declared to them, "Ye believe not because YE ARE NOT OF MY SHEEP"? (John 1:26). Oh! Shattering Word of Christ! If ever the Jewish theory of prophecy was utterly demolished it is in the 10th of John. The heavenly David was appeared. Ezekiel has been fulfilled - is being fulfilled every day. The only Israel the Lord recognizes as His own is that of which He declares, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

(John 10: 27-28)

Nor is there any room here for the cavils of other interpreters who say, "True, but we still believe that after the gentiles are served there will be a fulfillment - a special fulfillment - for the earthly Jews".

Thou canst not do that, O man, for Christ has obliterated all distinction of race and genealogy in the fulfillment of prophecy. Hast thou forgotten His words in this very chapter - "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd"? (Verse 16) In these words He gathers the gentile into the fold of Israel and abolishes all distinctions so that for ever and ever, without change, there is "one fold and one shepherd".

There is nothing in the Bible which suggests the Word of God is to the Jew first, then to the gentile - AND THEN TO THE JEW AGAIN.

Those who diligently compare Christ and Ezekiel in these portions named will not fail to see that Christ is the promised David, and that the time of the fulfillment of the glorious prophecy was the time when the heavenly David stood among the Pharisees, the false shepherds, and announced Himself as the Good Shepherd of Ezekiel's prophecy.

They will also see beyond shadow of doubt that the time of fulfillment being so dated back to the commencement of the Christian era, fixes the spiritual meaning of prophecy inasmuch as it was THEN that Israel's monarchy was restored; it was THEN that David the King appeared on His throne; it was THEN the Covenant of Peace was set up and sealed (Ezekiel 34:25); it was THEN the showers of blessing began to fall (v. 26), and THEN the house of Israel knew that He who had come amongst them was the

Lord their God.

Inasmuch as the earthly Israel decidedly did NOT know that Jesus Christ was God, but crucified Him upon the Tree, then either prophecy has failed, or THE CHURCH IS ISRAEL, THE ONLY SUBJECT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROMISES. And away go futurism and literalism and Dispensationalism, to the moles and to the bats.

THE PLACE AND MYSTERY OF ESAU

Mount Seir is introduced in Chapter 35, at first glance out of place. Surely God has finished with the alien nations in the section preceding? But no! Mount Seir is Esau, and stands for the reprobate of all ages, the false claimants to the inheritance. The introduction here of Esau is another indication, that it is the elect covenant seed of Jew and gentile in the Church of the Firstborn, the heavenly Jerusalem, and City of God, with whom Ezekiel's prophecy has to do.

What though the imagery of his vast vision be taken from the local situation of the earthly Jerusalem? If the latter is a figure of the eternal so is the former. The mountains of Israel (36:1) the forsaken cities (v. 4), the tilling of the wasted earth, the repopulation of the desolations - these are all the figures of that regenerate nation of Jew and gentile which constitutes the Kingdom of God which it was the purpose of Christ in redemption to establish (John 3:3).

It is here that those interpreters who simply heap texts together according to the sound of the names therein - Israel, Jerusalem, mountains, hills, temple, etc. - make their fatal error in mistaking the image for the reality. It was never the purpose of God to have His prophets foretell in raw language that Israel after the flesh will be abolished forever; a new Israel will take its place, consisting of Jew and gentile and the Kingdom will not be visible because it will be a spiritual reality. It was never, we say, the purpose of God to make faith unnecessary for entrance into life by such literalisms. As late as Christ's day, He spoke to them in parables, NOT (as incompetent preachers allege), to make truth plain and easy and childish, but on the contrary, to blind, and harden, and seal up the unbeliever in his sinful rebellion against God. So says Christ when after relating the parable of the Sower, He explains to His disciples why He spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10-17).

"Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.... In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which saith, By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive".

So all prophecy is couched in that form of language which conceals the wisdom of God, because the nature of prophecy is moral and sanctifying, to be apprehended only by faith. The literal method of interpretation is the method of the Pharisees which destroyed the nation, rejected the prophets, and crucified the Saviour.

Prophecy is not a mere foretelling of events yet future but is a sanctifying, revelatory ministry dealing with spiritual mysteries.

Let our readers judge fairly between the dry bones of literalists and the inspiring and sanctifying effects of the spiritual understanding of prophecy which we have tried, altogether inadequately, to present.

We will be content to abide by the result.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-alexander/prophecy-spiritually-understood-pt-4-ezekiel-and-his-brethren/>

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