

CHAPTER XX

A Cosmic Artist--Ezekiel

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Although neither mentions the other, Ezekiel and Jeremiah were contemporaries, the former much the younger of the two. Ezekiel is the "Watchman" of the captivity. His "call" came to him five years after his deportation to Babylon in 597 B.C. He was the son of a priest, was married and lived in his own house among a colony of his fellow exiles in a place called Telabib. The exiles had the freedom of the city, many held influential positions; they were an organized community with "elders" at their head. At first Ezekiel was not popular with his people for he would not prophesy a speedy return as the "false prophets" did. He had, however, a small following which met at his home, and the deepest interest of those exiles was the welfare of Jerusalem. After its fall, the attitude of the exiles became more favorable to the prophet, for he had long predicted that event.

Ezekiel was the first Hebrew prophet to write a consecutive book. The books of preceding prophets were fragments of oral discourses, gathered together but not always in sequential order. Ezekiel wrought out a book which is a unified whole, it is divided into three great divisions. His imagination is powerful, akin to that of Dante. Three forms of prophecy are characteristic of him: "*We have symbolic actions*, in which truths to be taught are practically illustrated; *allegories*, which present the subject in hand under elaborate figures; and *visions*, in which material emblems stand out spontaneously before the prophet's mind."--(Dummelow's Commentary.)

Isaiah and Jeremiah had calls, luminous while upon them, preparatory to their life work; but that of Ezekiel seems to have stayed with him throughout his ministry; he repeats it in substance three times--graphic, spiritual pictures form themselves before his vision, and he is commanded to open his mouth and tell them, and without the vision and the command, he will not speak. His Cosmic Visions can only be given to those who understand the deeper truths; simpler prophets must therefore go out to the others.

By the River Chebar, in Babylon, the Vision opens, which has been so well told, the Occidental world by Milton in "Paradise Lost," Book VI. Amid all the elaborate pictures, Ezekiel is careful to make us understand, that it is not a concrete picture of one thing, but a universal picture of God and Man. He is careful not to identify the spiritual with the material, which is always the result of Cosmic Vision. The spiritual and the material never touch each other. What can that mean when the spiritual fills everything? What is the material? The material is nothing but thought pictures in the human mind; human mind's concept of the Eternal Real. It is nowhere existent but in

human thought; therefore it is counterfeit; and as the Real appears the unreal disappears. "Material" body and the world are our first translations of life; Cosmic Vision enables us to see the Real and thereby correct our material concepts by spiritual reality.

We may liken the material world to the picture writing of children and primitive races; and the spiritual world to the great classics and works of art. No race could arrive at reality did it not commence to translate life to itself, in that first crude way. The concept of a material body disappears as we accept the ideal of a spiritual body that is eternal. Ezekiel is therefore careful to say, "the likeness of a throne," "the likeness of the appearance of man," "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah," for he who can look *through* the appearance can never after confound it with reality.

The most elaborate vision of any of the prophets is Ezekiel's, the vision of the wheels within the wheel, of man in God; the little world in the big world, the microcosm in the macrocosm. Ezekiel is charged with the message to man universal, in the amber colored atmosphere of the Infinite Glory. Out of the "North" the highest point it comes; "a fire infolding itself" and from it; "the likeness of four living creatures." "They had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces," the central face man, reason; on the *right side* the lion, strength; on the left side, the ox, sacrifice; and the innermost the eagle, the seer, symbolic of divine sonship. Individuality is here, their faces and wings are separate above; co-operation is seen of man with man, in the joining of the wings; transmutation of the body, in the covering of the body with the wings.

And, Oh, the *encouragement* of it; "they every one went straight forward; whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went." Is it just our *blindness* that does not see this? Was the penitent thief going straight to Paradise all of the time, as was the Master? Was the other, the blasphemer, going straight forward also, and did he only have to reach the *other side* of the crucifixion to recognize the Saviour? We condemn the sinner, thinking that he is going in another direction than ourselves, but if we stood on the Mount, perhaps we too could see. "The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag course of a hundred tacks," and from this eminence of Cosmic Vision all would be seen "going straightforward." The eleventh hour labourer received the same as those who served all the day, because there is only one reward, *The Vision*.

"As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches, it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright and out of the fire came forth lightning." Can this be aught else save the real of man, playing and leaping through our consciousness; breaking through the material barrier, which we ourselves have erected? Flashes like "lightning" illumine us--intelligence that we know to be higher than that which we know as man's.

"Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, for each of the four faces thereof. The appearance of the wheels and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel. As for their rings, they were high and dreadful, and they four had their rings full of eyes round about. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels."

The trinity is God, Man and Work. The omnipresence of God pervades the universe and carries all forward. When it stands all stands still. We should not have music without the *rest*; incessant motion or sound would not be rhythmic, and every thing in life is undulatory and rhythmic. Man's work is in his "ring," it is lifted up as he is lifted up, and intelligence is in work done under spiritual illumination, it is "full of eyes."

"And he said unto me, Son of Man, stand upon thy feet and I will speak to thee." God had been waiting since "the beginning" for this supreme moment. He can only speak to man who has found himself; i.e., who is standing upon his feet at attention. The term "son of man" is original with Ezekiel; who uses it over a hundred times--a term loved by the Great Teacher--who used it in the sense of composite man, the heir of all the ages.

Word comes to Ezekiel, "Go shut thine self in thine house," and from here he gives a series of illustrated lectures; he precedes his prophecies with acted out emblems; which gives the keynote of his talks. Thus he acts out the whole siege of Jerusalem. His "call" came in the fifth year of his captivity, therefore it was seven years before the fall of Jerusalem in 585 B.C. Daily his little circle came, and as the spirit entered into him he spoke. Impressive is Ezekiel's method of illustrating his discourses; he "eats bread of trembling" to show the panic in the besieged city; he brings out household goods, suggestive of flight. Then again he would appear walking with face covered, a flight by night.

Ezekiel has "punch" to his teachings; like preceding prophets, he did all in his power to awaken the consciousness of Jerusalem; the people must see sin, not through a refined glamour, but in its own hideousness. Such is the Parable of the Foundling, in the sixteenth chapter: "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, Thus said the Lord God unto Jerusalem: Thy birth and thy nativity is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was thy father, and thy mother was an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thou wast not washed in water to cleanse thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these things unto thee, to have compassion on thee; but thou wast cast in the open field, for that thy person was abhorred in the day thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee weltering in thy blood, I said unto thee, In thy blood, live; yea, I

said unto thee, In thy blood, live. I cause thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou didst increase and wax great, and thou attained to excellent ornament; thy breasts were fashioned, and thy hair was grown; yet thou was naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, said the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with sealskin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain about thy neck. Thou didst eat fine flour and honey and oil, and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper unto royal estate. And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect, through my majesty which I put upon thee, said the Lord."

All that Jehovah had done for the city, but the more that we have it seems the less we really desire to be. "Thou didst trust in the beauty," ungrateful foundling that she was; destroyed she must be before she could see that beauty and power belong to only the *One*. None other thing can the great Jehovah do; he must destroy her, that losing her life she may find it in him.

To the little home in Babylon the grim reaper comes; but Ezekiel in his sorrow does not bow under it; he shows others how to nobly meet him. Ezekiel's wife dies, but sorrow is coming to the whole of his circle; all who gather around him have relatives in Jerusalem, and death will come to many of them. Ezekiel will not give way to personal woe when others need comfort and work is to be done for them. Surely this is what the Nazarene meant when he told the man, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." To sit and nurse our private woes is selfishness; to rise and do the work that confronts us is *character*; and character is the supreme end to which we all work. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but to the one who never gives up and goes "straight forward."

"Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke; yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead, bind thy head-tire upon thee, and put thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning; and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

"And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so? Then said I unto them, the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Speak to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord: Behold I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye left behind shall fall by the sword. And ye

shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your heads: ye shall not mourn nor weep. Thus shall Ezekiel be unto you a sign: and according to all he hath done shall ye do."

We can never teach beyond what we ourselves live up to; the teaching not backed up by the demonstration is without power; it is empty. His people were prepared when the shock came! "And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying: *The city is smitten*. Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb." His silence which had begun with his wife's death and the siege of Jerusalem was thus ended.

Individuality is a strong point in Ezekiel's teachings; he shows the foolishness of believing in outside saviours; each man must be his own saviour: "Son of man, when a land sinneth against me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out my hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut it off from man and beast, though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness saith the Lord."

But the "righteousness" of each saves himself, it matters not what external condition he is in. No man is under the curse of heredity; each is unhampered and free to work out his own salvation: "The word of the Lord came unto me again saying, What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying,

The father's have eaten sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge?

As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth it shall die." Only for our own individual actions are we responsible, for this we pay the penalty of death. When we cease to sin, we cease to die; for we have broken through the belief in materiality.

Ezekiel also teaches our responsibility to others: "So thou, son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me; When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man thou shalt surely die, and thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require from thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way, and he turn not from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but thou has delivered thy soul."

There can be no desolation or unfruitful condition to the seer. Chapter 37,--The Valley of Dry Bones, is but the son of man's opportunity to prophesy. Under the prophetic word, he can see the bone come to bone, the sinew laid upon them, and the flesh creep up over them; then, joy of joys, the breath of life come into them. So lies unseen the

limitless possibilities of man, waiting the word of prophecy that shall make them live in our consciousness.

Ezekiel exercised a great influence over the writers of the New Testament. His allegory of the Good Shepherd, undoubtedly suggested that illustration to Jesus. In Revelations, his influence is especially evident; the eating of the roll; the invasion of Gog and Magog; the measuring of the Temple; the life-giving river and the four-square city with its twelve gates.

He believed in the Messianic Kingdom. His prophecies were partially fulfilled in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple; but not yet has the full vision of any prophet been fulfilled, nor will it be until, "No man shall say, knowest thou God, for all shall know him from the least to the greatest." His Vision is for all time for those who having eyes, see. The all-Presence with its luminous amber atmosphere surrounds us at all times. "The light shineth in the darkness," we have only to turn to it believingly to have it break through our night of sense.