

MEET THE PROPHET!

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MY DEAR FRIENDS, in this, the fifth message in this current series, we stand on the threshold of entry into our careful examination of the Divine prophecies through יחזקאל, that is, Ezekiel.

Before we push open the door and enter, let us glance over our shoulders down the path we have trodden through the preceding four messages.

We found that a restoration of Israel to nationhood in the Promised Land was well within the content of Biblical predictive prophecy and we silhouetted the present new-old מדינת ישראל, State of Israel, against this prediction.

We next assured ourselves that Divine predictive prophecy is an actuality and we carefully distinguished it from mere human prognostication.

Our next step was to substantiate our previous postulation by a demonstration that Israel's tragic גלות, scattering, Diaspora, or dispersion, was one of the salient Divine predictions.

In our last message we found that the very fact of the night of sorrows was our guarantee of the dawn of hope for Israel; and, perhaps to our surprise, we made the further discovery that Israel's restoration to the land and later to the Lord is not based upon the Divine conditional covenant with Moses, but rather upon the Divine unconditional covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, made some 500 years earlier.

With this valuable background we are now ready surely to appreciate the prophecies of Ezekiel and to weigh them carefully against the amazing historic fact of the present new State of Israel and its possible future.

Before noting Ezekiel's prophecies, allow me to introduce you to the prophet יחזקאל himself.

Now stand perfectly still and hold on tightly, whilst I speed you back over the time-strip at supersonic speed into the remote and mysterious past.

Now, look down! What is this inconceivably prodigious and bewildering city we see immediately beneath us? Straddling the silver gleam of a broad, sweeping river, it is an impressive miracle of colour, beauty and glory some 200 square miles in area.

Surely we have neither seen nor imagined anything like those towering walls with which this city is encompassed! As high as the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, these walls are really artificial mountains.

Even on the top of the walls, see, at the edges, there are houses built facing each other, and even the space left between these confronting residences is sufficient for turning a four-horse chariot!

A speedway 85 feet wide is elevated on top of a wall 300 feet high. It is colossal! Stupendous! No less than 250 towers guard its strategic points and we can count quite 100 gigantic gates of gleaming bronze! What a city! Nearly 5 times the size of London!

As to the wonderful streets, they all bear evidence of scientific town-planning, crossing each other at right angles and interspersed with innumerable rectangular island plots.

One street in particular, running north and south, arrests our attention. Look at it! With its sidewalks of red breccia and central section of fine white limestone, this spectacular highway, although within the huge city, is yet lined on both sides by defensive walls 23 feet thick and adorned with impressive rows of lions relieved out in brilliant enamels and all having the awesome appearance as if they were advancing on us.

Crossing this magnificent street is a most remarkable gate with towers 36 feet high and the whole structure of staggering beauty. It is a blaze of colour; nearly 600 figures of bulls and animals in white and yellow enamel on a brilliant blue background appear as if animated and in a colourful procession.

What city is this? Are we in ancient Babylon and could this be the famous "Procession Street" or Sacred Way? If so, then, this gorgeous gate is none other than the dazzling Gate of Ishtar!

Yes! It is Babylon! For there, among the many other amazing temples, is the breathtaking Temple of Marduk. It is unforgettable! At the southwest angle of an enormous square, each side of which is some 500 yards long, stands a colossal tower on top of which rises another, and yet another, and even another on that to a total number of eight! It is glorious and immense. Running spirally around all these towers is an ascent, and in the uppermost tower we discern a spacious temple sumptuously furnished with statues and a table of pure gold! Gold and glory is everywhere.

Yes! We are beholding "Great Babylon," the first world-capital which has cast its spell over the minds of men for over 4,000 years!

But its glory shrouds an agony! The agony of captive Israel!

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." (Psalm 137:1)

For Israel, mighty Babylon is but a forlorn fortress, a gorgeous cage! And it is here, in this scene and circumstance, that we meet God's mouthpiece **יְחֶזְקֵאל**, Ezekiel.

Born of the priestly family of Zadoc, Ezekiel belonged to Israel's priesthood.

Jehoiachin was on the throne only three months when he, Ezekiel, and many others of the Southern Israel Kingdom were carried away captive by the Babylonians in the first deportation,

about the year 597 before the Common Era, some eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem by these same Babylonians and when Ezekiel was — well — about twenty-five years of age.

It was five years after Ezekiel's arrival in Babylon, that is, about 592 B.C.E., that God gave Ezekiel his great call.

Ezekiel appears as a stern and, I think, inflexible character, dramatic in message and manner, yet revered not only by his companions in exile but also by his compatriots throughout all generations, by whom he is classed in the highest rank of Israel's prophets.

He was married and actually had a residence in Babylon but was tragically deprived of his wife in sudden circumstances.

His Divine commission was a most difficult one. His fellow captives were under the delusion that the Babylonian power would soon be broken by rescuing Egyptians; Ezekiel had to disillusion them on that score and urge the captives to become reconciled to their condition because God really meant what He said and what had been prophesied would be fulfilled.

As far as we know, Ezekiel was the only prophet whose sphere of activity lay beyond the Holy Land itself.

As the mouthpiece of God, this **“son of man”** predicted the fall of Jerusalem, the ultimate restoration of Israel, and the glorious spiritual regeneration of the people of Israel in the days of a future glorified David, obviously the Messiah.

In their History of the Jewish People, Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx confirm this viewpoint when they say Ezekiel prophesied a reunion “under one shepherd, a glorified David. The supreme condition was national penitence, a new heart and a new spirit, which themselves would be the gift of God.”

In the quotation I have just provided, you will notice how the historians also confirm, in effect, my own statement in a previous message that Divine Grace under the Abrahamic covenant, and not Law under the Mosaic covenant, would be the basis of God's dealing with restored Israel.

Of Ezekiel and Israel's Restoration, Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, M.A., writes:

“Like his predecessors, Ezekiel predicted not only the return from the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the Temple, but also the ultimate redemption and regeneration of Israel in a distant age in the future. The Messianic prophecies of Ezekiel resemble those of Isaiah.”

My dear friends, I firmly believe the learned Rabbi has described perfectly correctly the purport of Ezekiel's Divine message.

Today, our little reborn nation of Israel is harassed by problems within and surrounded by enemies without. What is to be its future?

To whom shall we turn for the answer to such a question? Surely none better nor more reliable than the one who, over two thousand years ago, predicted, as I believe, the very Restoration of Israel which we have witnessed in our own day. I refer you, then, to this same prophet Ezekiel.

The prophet's name **יחזקאל**, Ezekiel, means "God strengthens." Let us take that name as a garrison of hope as we enter into these vital prophecies in our succeeding messages.

Dr Lawrence Duff-Forbes

(1900-1964)

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