

Preface To The Prophet Ezekiel (1545 and 1532)

Ezekiel, like Daniel and many more, went willingly into captivity at Babylon, along with King Jeconiah, according to the counsel of Jeremiah, who constantly advised that they submit to the king of Babylon and live, and not resist, or they would be destroyed(Jeremiah 21:8).

Then, when they had come to Babylon (as Jeremiah shows in Jeremiah 24:6), with his kind words of encouragement), they became impatient and were sorry beyond measure that they had submitted, since they saw that those who had stayed in Jerusalem, and not surrendered, had possession of the city and everything, and hoped to make Jeremiah a liar and defend themselves against the king of Babylon, and remain in the land.

The false prophets helped, encouraging the people at Jerusalem to think that Jerusalem would not be captured and that Jeremiah was a lying heretic. Along with this went the usual circumstance, that those at Jerusalem claimed that they were holding honestly and firmly to God and Fatherland, but that the others had submitted, and deserted God and Fatherland, and were faithless traitors, who could not trust or hope in God, and went over to their enemies because of the vile talking of Jeremiah, the liar. That hurt and embittered those who had submitted to Babylon and their captivity became a double one. O how many a sound curse must they have wished on Jeremiah, whom they had followed and who had led them astray so miserably!

Therefore, God raised up in Babylon this prophet Ezekiel to encourage the captives and prophesy against the false prophets at Jerusalem and confirm the word of Jeremiah. This he does thoroughly, and prophesies far harder and far more than Jeremiah of how Jerusalem shall be destroyed and the people perish, with king and princes; but along with this, he promises that they shall return home to the land of Judah. This is the most important thing that Ezekiel did in his own time, and he deals with this down to chapter 25.

After that, down to chapter 34, he extends his prophecy to all the lands round about, which the king of Babylon was to afflict. Then follow four chapters on the spirit and kingdom of Christ, and after that on the last tyrant in Christ's kingdom, Gog and Magog. At the end he rebuilds Jerusalem, encouraging the people to believe that they shall go home again; but in the Spirit he means the eternal city, the heavenly Jerusalem, of which the Apocalypse also speaks.

A New Preface To The Prophet Ezekiel (1545 and 1541)

St. Jerome and others write that it was, and still is, forbidden among the Jews for any man under thirty years of age to read the first and last parts of the Prophet Ezekiel and the first chapter of the First Book of Moses. To be sure, there was no need of this prohibition among the Jews, for Isaiah

29:11 prophesies that the entire Holy Scripture is sealed and closed to the unbelieving Jews; as St. Paul also says, in 2 Corinthians 3:15, that the veil of Moses remains over the Scripture, so long as they do not believe in Christ.

Their works prove that too; for they rend and torture the Scriptures in their interpretation of them, like filthy swine wallowing and rolling in a pleasure garden, so that it would be desirable if they were to stay unentangled with the Scripture, though many of our own people cling so tight to the rabbis and have such confidence in them, that they judaize more than the ancient Jews themselves.

This vision in the first part of Ezekiel, however, is nothing else, as I understand it (let another improve on it!) than a revelation of the kingdom of Christ in faith, here on earth, in all four quarters of the whole world, according to Psalm 19:4, *In omnem terram*. For no one can be a prophet, as St. Peter testifies, unless he have the Spirit of Christ. But to give an interpretation of all of it is too long a matter for an introduction. To put it briefly This vision is the spiritual chariot of Christ in which He rides here in the world, that is, His entire holy Church.

There are the four beasts, which he calls, in Ezekiel 10:1, “Cherubim,” for He sits, rides and travels on cherubim, as the Scripture often declares; each has four faces and they stand like four horses in a square, yet inside and between the wheels. For there are also four wheels in a square about the beasts, by each beast a wheel, so arranged that they can go to the four quarters of the world, that is, in front, behind, to both sides, without needing to turn.

Likewise the living creatures go, on round feet, toward the four quarters of the world and need not turn. Here is no axle, pole, frame, pin, rack, wagon, rope, or trace, but the Scripture drives it all surely from within. Above is heaven, like a saddle-cloth, and in it a throne for a saddle, and on it God, that is, Christ, sits.

The four wheels go alike, for all churches in the four corners of the earth, that is, in the whole world, have an equal, single, harmonious gait, in faith, hope, love, the Cross, and all spiritual things, and are not driven from without, by doctrines of men, but from within, by one Spirit (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:5, Ephesians 4:4).

And the four beasts also go with the wheels, or rather the wheels with them, forward, backward, upward, and to both sides; for the apostles, or preachers, the Word of God, baptism, sacrament, keys and all that belongs to the spiritual government of the Church are also alike and in agreement throughout the world. And the beasts and the wheels hold fast together, so that the chariot is one, without external binding, fastening, or bracing. Thus everything is fourfold, — four beasts, four faces to a beast, four feet to a beast, four hands to a beast, four wings to a beast, four wheels, and four spokes to a wheel. That signifies, as said, that Christendom, or the kingdom of Christ, is to go to the four corners, that is, into all the world.

This vision, however, signifies the end and destruction of the synagogue, or of Judaism, that is, of

the priesthood, the worship, and the organization given and instituted by Moses, all of which were instituted for no longer time than until the coming of Christ, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:3 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, and Christ Himself in Matthew 11:13. The Epistle to the Hebrews also deals fully with this subject and the Jews take terrible offense at it, and it is a stumbling-block to them, even to the present day.

In opposition to the blindness of the Jews, it should be known especially that all the prophecies which say that Israel and Judah shall return again to their lands and possess them in a bodily way forever, are long since fulfilled, and that the hopes of the Jews are utterly vain and lost.

For this prophecy contains two things. The first is that Israel and Judah shall return to their land after their captivity, and this came to pass through King Cyrus and the Persians, before Christ's birth, when the Jews returned to their land and to Jerusalem from all countries, and came to Jerusalem every year to the feasts, even out of foreign lands, and drew many Gentiles with them and to them.

But the hope of the Jews that there shall be another physical return, when all of them together shall come back into the land and set up there the old Mosaic order of things,-this is a dream of their own and there is not a letter in the prophets or the Scriptures which says or signifies anything of the kind. It is written, indeed, that they shall return out of all lands whither they have been driven, but not all of them, only some of them out of all lands. There is a great difference between a return of all the Jews and a return out of all lands. The return out of all lands is fulfilled, but the return of all the Jews was never prophesied, but rather the opposite; just as at Jerusalem, while it was yet standing, both before and after the Captivity, not all the people were the people of God, but the most of them were people of the devil, idolaters and murderers, and the worst people on earth.

The second thing, and the best thing in this prophecy, and one that the Jews will neither see nor heed, is that God promises to create something new in the land and make a new covenant, not like the old covenant of Moses that they dream about. This is plainly there in Jeremiah 31 and many more places. There are to be no more two kingdoms, but one kingdom, under their King David, who is to come, and it shall be an everlasting kingdom in the same physical land.

This, too, is fulfilled. For when Christ came, and found the people gathered out of both Israel and Judah, and out of all lands, so that the land was full, He began the new order, and established the promised new covenant, and did it not at any spiritual place, or at another physical place, but exactly in the same physical land of Canaan, and at the same physical Jerusalem, as had been promised, whither they had been brought back out of all lands.

And although they did not want this covenant, or rather would not accept it, it has, nevertheless, remained an everlasting covenant, not only at Jerusalem and in that land; but it broke out from there into all the four corners of the world, and remains to the present day, both at Jerusalem and everywhere. For the place, Jerusalem, is still there, and Christ is Lord and King there, as in all the world; He helps and hears all those who come thither, as He does in all the world. Meanwhile He

lets Mohammed, with his tyranny, and the pope with his jugglery, do what they do; He is and remains Lord over all.

The Jews hold fast to the name of Israel and claim that they alone are Israel and we are Gentiles; and this is true so far as the first part of the prophecy and the old covenant of Moses are concerned, though this is long since fulfilled. But according to the second part of the prophecy and the new covenant, they are no longer Israel; for all things are to be new, and Israel, too, must become new, and they alone are the true Israel who have accepted the new covenant, which was established and begun at Jerusalem.

For according to the old covenant I am no Israelite, or Jew; but I claim that I am the son of St. Paul and an Israelite or Benjamite; for he is my father, not the old Paul, however, but the new Paul. He is still the old Paul, but out of the old Paul there has arisen a new Paul in Christ, and he has begotten me in Christ by the Gospel, so that according to the new covenant, I am like him. Thus all the Gentiles who are Christians are the true Israelites and new Jews, born of Christ, the noblest Jew. Everything, therefore, rests in the new covenant, which the Messiah was to found, making all things new, as He has done.

And this rule is to be noted well, — when the prophets say of Israel that it is all to return or be gathered, as in Micah 2:12, Ezekiel 20:40, etc., they are certainly speaking of the Israel, no member of which will remain outside the everlasting kingdom of Christ. It cannot possibly be understood to mean the old Israel, for the most of them, living and dead, stayed in Assyria and Babylonia and only a very few returned; Ezra numbers them all.

The Jews, however, want to have a Messiah according to the old covenant, and pay no heed to this new covenant. So they miss both covenants and hang between heaven and earth; the new covenant they will not, the old they cannot, have. Therefore the Scriptures are sealed against them (Isaiah 29:10) and they understand none of the prophets, and they are here without any government, either physical or spiritual. The physical, earthly government they have not, for they have neither king nor lord, neither kingdom nor principedom; the spiritual, too, they have not, for they will not accept the new covenant and have to be without a priesthood. In a word, they not only despised this new covenant, but persecuted it and wanted to extirpate it and would not endure it; and their covenant has been destroyed by it.

Even though Jerusalem could have remained and the whole ancient order, the new covenant would, nevertheless, have had to come and make all things new, in order to fulfill the Scriptures; as they are now fulfilled in Christendom; namely, there would have had to be at Jerusalem an apostle, bishop, or preacher, — as Christ Himself established things, — who would have had to rule Christ's Church there, preach the Gospel, baptize, administer the Sacrament, absolve, bind, etc. If the high priest, — Caiaphas, or another, — had been unwilling to do this, an apostle would have had to do it, or one of the apostles' successors, as has happened heretofore and must happen. Thus the eternal kingdom of Christ would have had to rule even in the old Jerusalem, as well as in all the world, as the prophecy

had promised, and the old kingdom of Moses would have remained as a temporal government. For so the old, worldly, temporal government remains in all the world, and does not at all prevent the establishment of the new, spiritual, everlasting rule and kingdom of Christ under it and within it, though this kingdom has its own peculiar nature, as we clearly see. Especially is this the case where there are righteous kings and princes, who tolerate this new, everlasting kingdom of Christ under their old government, or accept it themselves, promote it, and desire, as Christians, to be in it. Otherwise the greater part of the kings, princes, and lords hate the new covenant and kingdom of Christ as poisonously and bitterly as the Jews at Jerusalem, and persecute it and would wipe it out, and like the Jews, they go to destruction because of it. That is what happened to Rome and will happen to others also, for it is promised that Christ's new kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and the old kingdom must perish in the end.

It is well to remember, too, that since God Himself calls this kingdom a new kingdom it must be a far more glorious kingdom than the old kingdom was or is, and that it was God's will to make it a far better kingdom than the old one; and even though it had no other glory, this alone would be enough to make it glorious beyond measure, — that it is to be an everlasting kingdom that will not come to an end like the old, human kingdom.

Now beside this, it contains such immeasurable, glorious blessings as forgiveness of sins, peace with God, security against everlasting death and all evil, communion with the divine Majesty, with all angels and saints, joy and pleasure in the whole creation, even in a bodily sense; for this same body, which is now the old body, shall also become new, together with the whole creation, as the soul has already begun to become new in faith.

Therefore the Jews do themselves wrong and injury when, through the Messiah, they desire, not the new kingdom, but the former, old, transitory kingdom, where they will possess, in mortal flesh, silver, gold, wealth, power, honor, pleasure, and joy, which are counted before God as very little things, nay, as nothing at all; for if He had willed to promise such a kingdom, He would call it, not a new kingdom, but another and better kingdom.

And in comparison with this world's goods, nothing else can be called new and better, except only the spiritual, everlasting, blessed goods in heaven, among which there can be nothing bad or evil. But among the earthly, old, temporal goods, however, glorious, — such as the Jews dream that they will get from their Messiah, — there must always be much that is bad, much that is evil; at least death must be there, and an end of these goods.

These two things Ezekiel teaches us when he encourages the people to expect the return from Babylon, but prophesies more about the new Israel and the kingdom of Christ. That is his vision of the chariot, and it is also the temple, in the last part of his book.

He who would understand this building of the temple, altar, city, and land, which Ezekiel describes,

must take up Lyra, with his figures and glosses, otherwise he will toil and labor at the task in vain; and since we have not known how better to put the figures on paper, we have not attempted it, and refer the reader to Lyra; and besides, it is not possible to plot out a building on paper, but a carved model would have to be made.

About the significance of it, one doctor has thought one way, another a different way. But the understanding of it that is held by the Jews and others like them is, above all things, to be rejected. They think it is “the third temple,” which must be built by the Messiah, who is to come, and in their foolish and vain hope, they claim for it much great glory. The blind and ignorant people do not see that the text cannot stand the interpretation of their dreams, as Lyra, too, has powerfully shown. For Ezekiel says neither that this city shall be called Jerusalem, nor that it shall stand at the place where Jerusalem is situated. Jerusalem hangs on the north side of the mountain and the Temple stood in the midst of it, on Mount Moriah, and the castle of Zion high up toward the south.

But this city of Ezekiel is to lie to the south and he says, “It shall be called Dominus ibi, ‘There God,’ or ‘God there,’ that is, ‘There God Himself is.’ And the Temple shall not be in it but, as the reckoning shows, it shall be seven good, big, German miles to the north; and the city on the high mountain shall be close to nine good, big, German miles both in length and breadth, so that the encircling wall shall be thirty-six German miles around; we may call that a little city, and the hill; on which it lies, a little hill.

If a citizen, living at the southern end of the city, wanted to go to church, or to the Temple, he would have to walk sixteen miles, nine through the city and seven to the Temple. The blind Jews do not see this absurdity, for this cannot be any physical building; still less can it be at the place where Jerusalem is situated, as they falsely hope.

There shall also be a great water, flowing out of the Temple into the Dead Sea (as the papists, — fools that they are! — sing of their holy water), and this fits in nowise into the landscape of Israel.

Besides, the tribes and the land of Israel are very differently divided and arranged, so that the city and the Temple shall not lie in any tribe of Israel, though Jerusalem was previously located in the tribe of Benjamin. All of this and much more is plainly given in the text.

The altar shall be eleven ells high and fourteen ells wide at the top, so that even if a priest manages to mount the steps, he must have an arm seven ells long to reach onto the altar and arrange the sacrifice. It would have to be something of a priest, fifteen or sixteen good, big ells tall.

Therefore, this building of Ezekiel is not to be understood to mean a physical building, but like the chariot, so the building at the end is nothing else than the kingdom of Christ, the Holy Church, or Christendom, here on earth until the last day.

But how all the parts of the prophecy are to be interpreted and arranged, this we will leave until that life in which we shall see the whole building finished and complete. We cannot see it all now, since it is still in building, and much of the stone and wood that belong to it is not yet born, let alone prepared for the building. It is enough that we know it to be the house of God and his own building, in which we all are.

One who has the leisure and the inclination can look into it and search it, if he will take up God's Word and the sacraments, with the powers and effects which the Holy Ghost works in the Church through them, and bring these things into agreement. The Revelation of John can also help.