

Ezekiel-F B Meyer

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EZEKIEL Our Daily Homily F B Meyer

Ezekiel 1:19 When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them. (r.v.)

These living creatures, whom Ezekiel afterwards recognized as cherubim, represented the entire round of animate existence. The lion's majestic strength, the patient strength and labor of the ox, the keen vision and aspiring flight of the eagle, combined in perfect proportion in their noble forms. The wheels may represent the round of Providence — what we would call the circle of nature. The point for us to notice is the perfect harmony between the spirit, the living creatures, and the wheels; and from this we learn the deep and sacred lesson, that those who live and walk in the Spirit may count on the co-operation of all animate creatures, and the concurrence of Divine providence. When we live consciously and voluntarily in the center of the Divine will, we are at the center of many concentric circles, and all things serve us. All things are ours.

If we would be Spirit-taught and guided, we must die to ourselves, to sin, and to the world; no longer seeking anything for ourselves in this world. If, says Pastor Stockmayer, we have treasure outside of Christ, our heart will hasten to where our treasure lies. Only those who account themselves set loose from the things of this world to serve Christ entirely, amid the things of this world, can distinguish the movements of the Spirit.

Each is guided in a way that he knows; and has the special name written on the white stone. God speaks in the depths of our being, far deeper than the region of our feelings, dispositions, or impressions; and He will make Himself heard, if only we are set to obey Him. Let surrender become the abiding habit of life, and the spiritual hearing will be more and more acute.

Ezekiel 2:6 Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words.

Ezekiel's lot was cast in difficult times. His people, to whom he was sent, whether by the Chebar in captivity, or still lingering around their doomed mother-city, were as briars, thorns, and scorpions. Embittered by their many sorrows; convicted by conscience of their guilt before God; compelled to trace a close connection between their sins and their punishment — it was inevitable that they would turn with peculiar dislike on any one who dared, like Ezekiel, to be an incarnate conscience to them, reminding them of their evil ways, remonstrating, exhorting, pleading.

Many readers of these words are in similar circumstances. Missionaries who are obliged to rebuke, not only the sins of the ungodly, but the inconsistencies of their own converts; ministers at home on whom the burden rests of protesting against popular and fashionable iniquity, or addressing stern words of rebuke to influential but worldly members of their churches; even young clerks or working-men whose life is thrown among the godless and profane, and who seem called upon to lodge their solemn warning against words and ways that are not good. Providing these enter their protest lovingly and tenderly, with no thought of their

superiority, with no mere desire to wound and annoy, but to warn the sinner and to uphold the claims of Christ — their mission is a very salutary and necessary one. But it is sure to bring on them a storm of dislike.

At such times there is nothing for us but to abide in the presence of our Master Christ, weeping for the sins we rebuke, interceding for those who revile. Not fearful nor afraid, not flinching from our duty; but ever hearing his sweet reassuring voice.

Ezekiel 3:1 Eat this roll, and go speak.

To each of us a Hand is put forth; and therein is the roll of the Book. We must feed on it for ourselves. We must find God's words and eat them; they must be the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. It is specially incumbent on those who have to go forth and speak, to open their mouths and eat the roll. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that, because we are constantly handling God's Word for the purpose of teaching and exhorting others, we are therefore feeding on it for ourselves. It is possible to acquire an intellectual knowledge of the truth, while the heart is entirely unaffected. But how far removed is this from that spiritual consideration of God's Word, by virtue of which it yields up its spiritual nutriment to our growth in the Divine life.

Sometimes the message we must acquire and give is, like this roll, written within and without with lamentations, and mourning, and woe. It can hardly be otherwise, when we are called to speak to people who are of a hard forehead and a stiff heart. It is very sweet to receive God's messages; but it is bitter to have to deliver them when they proclaim, as they must, the inevitable and disastrous results of sin. Oh that we may not shrink to declare the whole counsel of God, whether rebellious men will hear or forbear. Perhaps there has not been enough of this element in our preaching. All sunshine, the Arabs say, makes the desert. The harvest will fail unless the frost of winter has thoroughly broken up the clods. But whenever we dwell on the sterner aspects of God's truth it must be with bitter tears. "I tell you, even weeping," the apostle said, "that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ."

Ezekiel 4:14 Then said I, Ah, Lord God!

The prophet was bidden, in a series of striking and significant actions, to show the people the impending fate of their nation and city. Amongst other injunctions there was one so abhorrent to his soul that he craved its mitigation. "Ah, Lord God!" he said, "spare me from this." And God was entreated, and reduced the pressure of the burden proposed to be laid on his servant.

May not the counterpart of this happen in our own experience? We may be feeling that certain trials are insupportable, or certain demands beyond our power to meet. At such hours of bitter anguish it is quite permissible for us to go into the secret place of the Most High and gasp out our complaint, saying, "Ah, Lord God!" God invites us to speak freely with Him thus, and sends gracious mitigations of our griefs. "Ah, Lord God," we say, "let this cup pass from me": and, lo! an angel is sent to strengthen us. "Ah, Lord God," we cry, "this cross is too heavy; this thorn in the flesh too sharp; this diet too nauseous:" and immediately there is some response of greater grace or lightened burden.

Oh, suffering child of God, get alone with Him, and talk freely. Do not hesitate to tell Him all that is in thine heart. Remember that Jesus said that the Father Himself loves us. We may go to that Father-heart, confiding to it how much we are suffering, not for ourselves only, but for their sakes who are dearer to us than life. Oh that they were happy, satisfied, safe! Has the duty become lately more than ever difficult? Has the smart become like a cancer with its venom? Take it to God! It is a sublime moment when the soul dares to plead its cause with God, saying, "Ah, Lord God!"

Ezekiel 5:9 I will do in thee that which I have not done.

It is an awful thing when those who have sinned against conspicuous privilege and opportunity come under the rod. Their punishment is infinitely heavier than that of such as have never known. The servant that knows his Lord's will, and does it not, is condemned to be beaten with many stripes. It was because Capernaum had been exalted to heaven that she was cast down to Hades. If an archangel falls, it must be to hell.

The child of God, like Israel, is set in the midst of the nations to testify to pure and undefiled religion; but if he rebels against God's judgments and statutes in doing wickedly, his chastisement is necessarily in proportion to the eminence of his former privileges. God cannot afford to deal lightly with the sin of his own people. Were He to do so, He might be accused of partiality, and they might presume. Well may the author of "Imitation" say, "Esteem not thyself better than others, lest perhaps in the sight of God, who knoweth what is in man, thou be accounted worse than they."

It becomes us to search our hearts to see if we are rejecting any of God's judgments, and refusing to walk in his will, or defiling his sanctuary with detestable things. A small black spot on a white ground is more noticeable than a larger one on a dark ground. A slight inconsistency in his child may lead to very heavy chastisements on the part of the Father in heaven. The nearer a pupil reaches towards perfection, the sterner is his master's discipline. Judgment begins at the house of God. If thou wert not capable of a rich fruitage, He would not take such pains with thee. Humble thyself under his mighty hand. He will exalt thee in due time.

Ezekiel 6:9 I have been broken with their whorish heart. And they shall loathe themselves. (r.v.)

We never realize what sin is till its passion is over, and we have time quietly to remember. Oh, the terror of those hours of remembrance and remorse! Sitting in the captivity of its prison, or serving in the heavy bondage of its fetters, the soul has time to review the bitter path by which it has come to such a pass, and the way it has broken the hearts of those who loved and trusted. But the most terrible element in remorse will be the personal one: "Shall remember Me."

One of our great writers depicts a heartless, thoughtless husband standing beside the newly covered-in grave of his wife, and saying, "Ah, Milly, Milly; dost thou hear me? I was not tender enough to thee; but it is too late to alter it now." The wife who has broken away from her husband, bringing desolation on a once happy home, and heart-break on the one she really loved, will have her time of remorse when she remembers him, and how he was broken by her sin. And she will loathe herself. The child who has given way to fits of ungovernable passion, which have broken up the home, and brought down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, will loathe itself. Similarly, as we review our past life, and see how we must have grieved the tender Spirit of God, we fall at the feet of Jesus and cover them with tears and kisses.

What a marvelous word is this! — "I have been broken." Our sin can give God the heart-break, because He loves us so. Indeed, on the Cross the Lord died of a broken heart; of this the issuing stream of blood and water was the sign. O heart of stone, thou too must break and loathe thyself, when thou seest thy Lord broken by thy sin!

Ezekiel 7:19 Their silver and their gold ... shall not satisfy their souls.

This chapter is full of alarms! An end: the end is come! (Ezekiel 7:2). An evil, an only evil: behold it cometh. An end is come; the end is come (Ezekiel 7:5–6). The time is come; the day is near (Ezekiel 7:7). Behold the day, behold it cometh; thy doom is gone forth (Ezekiel 7:10). The time is come (Ezekiel 7:12). At such a crisis, what can silver and gold do? Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn. None shall return. The sword is without; pestilence and famine within.

Generally silver and gold stand for much among the children of men; they are the keys to the unlocking of the treasures of life. But when the supreme crises come; when all hands are feeble, and all knees weak as water; when the day of the wrath of the Lord breaks — there is no help in silver and gold; they cannot satisfy or save.

Men forget that they are destined for immortality; and that God hath set Eternity in their hearts. How utterly impotent gold and silver, the things of earth, the abundance of goods which a man may store in his barn, to appease the conscience, or arrest the remorseless hunger of the soul for peace and purity and satisfaction! He is the happiest who is largely independent of these things, and lives a pilgrim life, reckoning that his enduring city is with God, whose treasures are heavenly and incorruptible. It is a great misfortune that professing Christians have failed to realize this. Too many of them are as eager to maintain and extend their establishments, as though life consisted in the abundance of what they possess. So missionary causes dwindle for want of funds; children are drawn into worldly alliances; and worldlings depreciate our holy religion.

Ezekiel 8:12 Chambers of imagery.

What disclosures were these! In the entry to the Temple court stood the great idol, here described as an image of jealousy; because, speaking after the manner of men, it greatly provoked the Eternal Spouse of Israel! The seventy elders engaged in worshipping every form of creeping things and abominable beasts, portrayed on the walls of the secret chambers! The women weeping for Tammuz, whose yearly death and resurrection were celebrated with licentious orgies! The five-and-twenty men with their backs toward the Temple! Is it to be wondered at that God could not spare, nor have pity?

But are there no chambers of imagery in our natures, which were meant to be the sanctuary of the Eternal? Is it quite certain that evil thoughts and imaginations have not imprinted themselves on the walls of the heart? Ah, it may be so. What seems fair and beautiful in the eye of man may be concealing terrible secrets, open only to that of God. In the secret of our hearts, we permit unclean birds to brood; in the darkness of our soul, wild thoughts wander at will. What need there is to adopt the venerable and touching words: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee."

There is deliverance from all this, by the grace and through the blood of the Lord Jesus. He can save and keep. He can so fill the soul with his presence that sin shall be utterly abhorrent. We may become so sensitive to the least approach of evil as to shelter ourselves in Him, before the first symptom of temptation shall have gained force and volume for its attack. Holy Spirit, keep thine own temple, we pray Thee!

Ezekiel 9:6 Come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary.

All these visions were given, as we learn from the first chapter, as Ezekiel was with the earlier groups of Hebrew captives in Babylon. His thoughts were greatly engrossed by what was transpiring in the beloved city among the remnant still residing there. The six men represented judgments yet impending, and the man clothed in linen with the inkhorn, the discriminating righteousness of God's judgments.

Judgment begins with the house of God; with those of us who are called to teach and preach, and bear office in the Church. The six men who had the slaughter-weapons began at the elders, described in the previous chapter, who were before the house. If any such are living in sin, God's judgment must fall first and more heavily on them, because they know better and profess more than others. But let it be remembered always that repentance and the putting away of sin will always avert the sword. "If thou wilt put away thine abominations, then thou shalt not remove."

Amid scenes of judgment, whether in the Church or the world, there is always a remnant, upon whom is the mark; on Lot in Sodom; on Israel amid the plagues of Egypt; on Rahab in the fall of Jericho; on the 144,000 at the Great Tribulation. They are safe amid the fiery indignation which devours the adversaries. Have we been touched by the blood, sealed by the Spirit, and branded with the mark of the brand of Jesus? Without doubt we have, if we know what it is to sigh and cry for the abominations that are wrought around us, and of which our own nature is capable, except for the grace of God. These are the signs which indicate the humbling, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Ezekiel 10:18 The glory of the Lord went forth from over the threshold, and stood over the cherubim.

The gradual withdrawal of God from his house is described in vivid and awful minuteness. In Ezekiel 9:3, it had gone to the threshold; Ezekiel 10:4, it had mounted up; Ezekiel 10:15, the cherubim mounted up; Ezekiel 11:23, it passes from the city. It is well worth our while to ponder this deep and searching lesson. The light of other days fades but slowly: the year sinks by almost insensible gradations to the fall of the leaf; grey hairs besprinkle our heads without our knowing it; before ever we are aware of it, the train has borne us miles off the main line to the wrong station. So gradually our hearts may backslide. Satan is too knowing to lead us at a single leap into the precipice, but conducts us by a gradual incline. A little less Bible reading; a slight slackening in watchfulness and prayer; an imperceptible drift worldwards.

But turn to Ezekiel 43:2–4. The glory of the Lord returned to the renovated temple. Like the dawn of a new day; like the sound of many waters, it came, it came. "This," God said, "is the place of my throne; ... and the house of Israel shall no more defile." Ah, backslider, God will come back to thee again. Thy repentance may be most inadequate; but if it be genuine, if thou dost truly turn to Him from thy sin, thy heart shall again become irradiate with his most blessed of holy light.

Without forcing, these words are also applicable to that coming for which we wait and long; when He who ascended shall descend again to be in us and with us for ever:—

"Hark! What a sound, and too divine for hearing, Stirs on the earth and trembles in the air! It is the thunder of the Lord's appearing! It is the music of his peoples' prayer!"

Ezekiel 11:16 Yet will I be to them a little sanctuary in the countries where they are come.

Away from the outward ordinances and the material edifice, the exiles would find more than the equivalent in God Himself. He would give them the reality, of which there had been the outward and visible emblems. Amid all their justly-deserved sufferings they would find a deep fountain of spiritual blessing and comfort in God's presence.

To those who are deprived of the means of grace. — Sufferers in sick rooms, travellers in lonely and distant places, missionaries amongst the heathen. How often to such comes the vision of the country church, when the summer air stole into the open window, bringing the breath of flowers; or of the great City church, with the well-known voice of a beloved minister. They long for these again. But God will be all and more.

To those who cannot derive benefit from the services they attend. — The clergyman is Ritualistic, or the Free-church minister is broad in his views, and unsympathetic with the deeper moods of the spirit. Still, it may be your duty to attend for example's sake; but whilst waiting before the Lord, He will draw near and become your sanctuary.

To those who are exposed to danger and persecution. — In the olden time the sanctuary was a place of refuge. All who fled thither were in safeguard. So, let the driven soul haste to the folds of the Tabernacle of God's presence. None can pursue it into that secret place. No weapon shall smite; and even envying voices shall die into subdued murmurs.

He that eateth the living bread — that confesseth Jesus to be the Christ — that keepeth his commandments — and that lives in love — dwells in God as his sanctuary, while God dwells in him as His.

Ezekiel 12:25, 28 The word that I shall speak shall be performed: it shall be no more deferred.

In various ways the people of Israel were endeavoring to minimize the effects of Ezekiel's denunciations of judgment. They did not deny that he spoke the word of God; but comforted themselves with the reflection that it was not likely to be fulfilled for some time yet "The vision that he seeth is for many days to come." God, on the other hand, said, "It shall be no more deferred."

We are all disposed to remove the wonder-working of God to the remote past or the distant future: either that He did miracles or will do them. Heaven touches the earth at this horizon or that; but it is remote from the place where we stand. This is the tendency of our mind; and for this reason we miss the manifestations of God's grace and power, which wait to enrich our lives. Now is the accepted time; now the day of salvation. As Christ is, so are we. There is as much of Divine power and love throbbing around, and within our easy reach, as ever filled the upper room at Pentecost, or shall break on the world in the millennial days. Let us not postpone our appropriation of it. Let us never permit the thought that God is not prepared to fulfill his promises here and now. Let us not lament over the past as having been better than the present can ever be expected to be, nor predict greater days for our children.

It is here that the distinction between fact, faith, and feeling, will help us. We very seldom, indeed, never until Spirit-taught, put these three in their right order. We try to feel that spiritual facts are so, instead of accepting that they are, and daring to act as if they were patent to physical sensations. A spiritual fact is true, even when you do not believe or feel it. Believe! act! and you will come to feel.

Ezekiel 13:2 Prophecy against the prophets of Israel ... that prophesy out of their own hearts.

It is a great temptation to those of us who are often called to speak for God, to prophesy out of our own heart, to follow our own spirit, and to profess to see what we have not seen. We are apt to say, "The Lord saith," when the Lord hath not sent us. These words of ours always tend towards soothing and pacifying guilty consciences with assurances of peace, peace. You may always tell when a man is speaking from the vanity of his own heart. He glozes over sin, and speaks with bated breath of its consequences.

This is what the Word of God describes as daubing a slight wall with untempered mortar, and sewing pillows on elbows for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread. The daubing makes the wall look as strong as possible, but it cannot save it from collapsing before the overflowing shower of God's judgment and the great hailstones of his wrath. The pillows may save the flesh from chafing, but cannot avert the blows of a broken law. Oh, take care, lest ye give men licence to sin, by the slight views ye circulate of its nature or penalty. Are not these lying divinations? Do they not grieve the heart of the righteous, and strengthen the hands of the wicked? Take care lest the fate of the daubing be the fate also of the false prophets: "The wall is no more; neither they that daubed it."

It is not an easy thing to speak to the prophets. But how necessary that there should be a Prophet to prophets: for these get into the way of supposing that they must be right, whose least word is so revered by their people. "You are very fond of preaching," said Dr. Andrew Bonar to one to whom he had been listening. "Yes, doctor; very." "But are you as fond of lost souls?"

Ezekiel 14:22 Ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem.

The sin of Jerusalem was so heinous that God was constrained to send on her his four sore judgments all at once and together. Each alone was so terrible that Noah, Daniel, and Job, had they been living, would only have succeeded in saving their own souls; but how much more when they befell the land unitedly! But, Jehovah says, ye shall come to know, when you review my work from the vantage-ground of the years, that I have not done without cause (or in vain, marg.) all that I have done (Ezekiel 14:23). Ye shall be comforted, when a remnant of sons and daughters escapes, who see and acknowledge their sinful ways and deeds.

Those words deserve to be carefully pondered. They seem to contain the very essence of God's thoughts in his dealings with us during the present age. "Ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done" (Ezekiel 14:23). We do not know the cause of so much that crushes us to the ground. But if we did know it as well as we shall know it some day, we should have no difficulty in reconciling God's dealings with his perfect love.

Yes, some day we shall be comforted! Comforted as to God's meaning in our sorrows and trials! Comforted as to his dealings with our dear ones! Comforted about his government of the whole universe, of which the world is part! We shall see that there was a cause or reason for all God's stern discipline. We shall admit that it was wisely adapted to its end, and achieved it. We are too prone to judge God hastily and superficially, instead of waiting to see the "end of the Lord," when all his reasons and purposes will be explained from the great white throne (see Revelation 15:3).

Ezekiel 15:2 What is the vine tree more than any tree?

What is the vine good for? Will it bear comparison with the trees of the forest? Do men make chairs, tables, house-roofs out of it? No, they will not make even a pin for hanging vessels on, out of the vine-wood. There is only one use for the vine — to bear fruit. If it fails to do that, it may as well be cast at once to the flames. Then it is still more useless; and as we gather the charred pieces together, we realize that they are hardly worth our care.

So with believers. Like Israel, they are God's vine, created in Christ Jesus unto fruit-bearing. The one purpose and end of their redemption and salvation is that they should bring forth fruit unto God; and if they fail in this, after having been pruned and enriched in every way, they are cast forth as worthless and unprofitable, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are

burned. Savorless salt is good for nothing: fruitless vines are utterly useless: professors who bear no fruit are worse than useless, they cumber the ground. Let us abide in Christ, that He may bear fruit through us. Let us be willing for all the pruning and discipline which God is pleased to send us, that we may bring forth more fruit; but let it ever be borne in mind that fruitfulness does not always mean activity, but the bearing of the sweet fruits of the Spirit, which consist largely in temper and disposition.

Apart from Christ, how helpless and worthless we are! Let us often, and particularly when tempted to vanity, conceit, self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, remember that we are only vine-branches, of no intrinsic worth, and only useful when the sap of the Vine is passing through us. "What hast thou, that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Ezekiel 16:14 Thy beauty ... was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee.

How rich this chapter is in spiritual significance for ourselves! We, too, were born in the land of the Canaanite — our father the first Adam; our mother Eve. There was no beauty in us by nature, but everything to cause abhorrence to the Holy God. And if we are washed and clothed, decked with gold and silver, arrayed in fine linen, silk, and embroidered work, eating fine flour, and honey, and oil, exceedingly beautiful and arrayed in royal estate, it is all of grace — of the exceeding and eternal grace of God. There is nothing of it at all in which we can boast ourselves. Of Him are we in Christ Jesus, through whom we are what we are. We are perfect only through his comeliness which He has put upon us.

First, let us dare to believe that it is so. Accept and value your position. In Christ, we are more than tolerated; we are loved. We are more than forgiven; we are arrayed in fair garments. The King greatly delights in us. In his eyes, and because his beauty is upon us, we are all fair. The joy that the Father has in Jesus, He has in us who are in Him. We may be deeply conscious of our sinfulness; but He doth not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. We need not shrink to take our place even among the holy ones of the Presence chamber, because we are accepted in the Beloved, and clad in his comeliness.

But, next, let us not presume. We have naught of our own. When the temptation tries us to pride ourselves on our goodness; to arrogate to ourselves a special position because of our superiority to others; to assume that we can be independent of our immortal Lover — then let us remember what we were.

Ezekiel 17:23 All fowl of every wing.

The cedar is a royal tree. It thrives 6,000 feet above the level of the sea. The concentric rings of one tree showed that it was 3,500 years old. What a contrast between the long-lived, deep-rooted, broad-branched tree, and the little birds that nest among the leaves!

The text suggests that Christ is the cedar, and all kinds of people seek rest in Him, as birds of every wing. Young and old, rich and poor; men high-soaring as the eagle, fierce as the raven, gentle as the dove. The young, just learning to try their wings; the old, weary, and lonely; those who have kept all the commandments from their youth, and those who have broken them all.

It does not matter with what wing we come to Jesus, so long as we come. The practised eye can easily recognize the birds by their flight; each bird has its own wing; so every soul has its own disposition and temperament — one feverish, the other languid and lethargic; one impetuous, the other dilatory; one affectionate and warm, the other cool and shy. But the Lord Jesus knows our frame, and understands us afar off. He does not chide the dove because it cannot breast the storm and face the sun like the eagle. He does not expect the sustained flight of the seagull from the sparrow; or the song of the nightingale from the chaffinch.

Do not imitate another; be yourself. Do not go about the world counting that you are useless and a failure, because you cannot do what is done by others. Learn how to be abased, and how to abound. Only rest in Christ. Out of the windy storm and tempest, make for your roosting-place under the shelter of his wing.

Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine.

This is bed-rock. Let us ever get down to the beginnings of things, when we state God's claims on men. Instead of only pleading with them, let us boldly assert God's claims upon them. All souls are his: of the African as of the European; of the heathen as well as of the Christian born; of the toiling, sorrowing, sinning, as of those that stand in the sunlit circle.

His by right of creation. "He made us, and we are his." Has not a man a claim on all that his hands have made? and has God less? His by right of redemption. To any man we have the privilege of saying, "You have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ." His by the right of his own holy and glorious Nature. Not to own Him and love Him supremely is a gross violation of the eternal fitness of things. The parent has a claim on his child.

Needest thou fear anything, fellow-Christian, since thou art his? Though thou goest forth alone into the wilderness, where there seems no spring, no food; though thou hast no visible means of sustenance through no fault of thine; though thou shalt be called to pass today out of this world into the unseen: since thou art God's, is He not responsible for thee? Will an owner allow his house to

fall out of repair, or his beasts to lack food and tendance? Will God not tend, maintain, nurture, and cherish thee? Would it not be to his discredit if He were careless of thee, his own? The fact of thy bearing his mark and stamp upon thee is guarantee enough of his obligation to be a God to thee. Let Him do with us as He please. Surely we can perfectly trust Him; He is well within his rights.

Ezekiel 19:1, 14 This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

This chapter is a dirge; first over two kings of the house of David, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachim, who, like wild beasts, had been carried off, the former to Egypt, the latter by the Chaldeans; and then over the whole royal family, described under the figure of a wasted vine, humbled and almost destroyed.

We, too, may lament for the sufferings and sorrows of our King. The Holy Spirit would not have us forget them; because our sin-laden and wounded hearts can only become healed by pressing against his wounds who was pierced by the nails and the spear. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself" — the agony and bloody sweat; the cross and passion; the scorn and reviling; the contradiction of sinners; and the malice of Satan. And as the full measure of his sufferings is unfolded to us we shall weep and lament; not for Him, but for ourselves and for our children.

That our sins nailed Him to the cross; that our guilt extorted from his heart the cry that He was forsaken; that his prolonged agony was borne in our stead, and borne for nothing else than for love of us; that we have grieved Him so, torn open his wounds, and added to his pains, by our rebellion and ingratitude; that the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and that we have been healed only by his stripes. Here is subject for lamentation indeed!

But it is strange that the remembrance of all this brings strength, and solace, and peace. As Bunyan says, "He hath given us rest by his sorrow." The bitterness of his sorrows alternately makes us sad and blessed. Sad that we brought Him such a heritage of woe: happy that since He has suffered, we are for ever emancipated from what had crushed us.

Ezekiel 20:32 We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. (r.v.)

There was a tendency among the chosen people to reason thus: Why should we be perpetually reminded of the claims of Jehovah? Why should we not do as we please? Why not do as other nations around, who select their own deities, and do not seem to suffer as we do? Nay, said the Most High, that cannot be. When once I have entered into covenant relations with any, they cannot lightly cast off those sacred bonds. My name and character are too deeply implicated. I must work for my holy Name's sake, that it may not be polluted (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22).

It is a very solemn thing to have become God's children. Sin is not the same in us as in others. In those it may be slightly passed over, but in us it will be visited with many stripes. We cannot sin with impunity, nor do as we list. As far as we go into sin, we shall have to come out of it. The more pleasure we may have had in forbidden paths, the more sharp the anguish through which we shall have to retrace our steps. We cannot be as the nations. We cannot serve wood and stone. We cannot go our own way.

But the thought cuts in two directions; if we are bound to God, He is also bound to us. We may not leave Him, but He cannot leave us! He will always be mindful of his covenant. There is one plea with God that never fails: "Do it for thy great Name's sake." He cannot deny Himself, or allow his honor to be trampled in the mud.

"Yes — howsoe'er I stray and range, Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change; I steadier step, when I recall That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall."

Ezekiel 21:27 It shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him

This prophecy was directed against Zedekiah and Jerusalem; and predicts the advance of Nebuchadnezzar, who is represented as considering an expedition against them and Ammon. Whatever the king of Judah thought to establish by his wit and power, God would overthrow. Nothing should stand, however carefully constructed, till the Messiah came to take up the kingdom and rule with meekness and righteousness.

I will overturn, overturn, overturn. Our King is always engaged in destruction, that He may the better occupy Himself with construction. He overthrows our cities of brick, that He may build them of marble. He removes the things that can be shaken, as things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. He destroyed the institutions of the Old Covenant, that He might substitute the New. This is the inner meaning of the earthquake that so often casts down our lofty towers.

That fortune which you had built up with so much care was overturned, that you might acquire the true riches. That reputation which you had established for integrity and self-restraint was overturned, that you might despair of yourself and avail yourself of the provision made for sinners in Jesus. That friendship was overturned, that you might come to the love of God.

"He took the silver and the gold, To make me rich in grace; He quenched earth's lights that I might see The shining of his Face."

And God will go on with this overturning work until every high thing that exalts itself against the Lord Jesus is thrown down, and He is enthroned.

Ezekiel 22:15 I will consume thy filthiness out of thee.

The idea here, and in the following paragraph, is of the smelting furnace. We are refined by fire. Fire is pain. It is the symbol of all that our nature shrinks from. But affliction is all this. It may be anxiety about money-matters; or the chronic ill-temper of some member of your family; or a random word; or a telegraphic message; or a whispered secret; or anxiety about your health: but your soul is filled with fire — keen, strong, alive, devouring. Do not wonder at this; for only so can you be delivered from your dross and filth.

But God appoints it. As much as the process of refining implies the presence of the refiner, the afflictions of the believer imply the presence and purpose of the Lord. The process could not be carried on without Him. We are sure that in every sick chamber where his servant lies, besides the attendant wife or nurse, sits the Great Refiner of silver; closer than close; nearer than near; tenderer than the tenderest. You may not see Him now; but some day when you look back on your present sufferings, you will understand, and say: "I could not have lived through it had not the Master been with me."

The trial is a sign of preciousness. You do not cast a stone into the crucible, or winnow chaff, or prune a bramble, or put a cinder in the lap-dog's meal. So, when Jesus subjects us to trial, it is only because, amid all our dross his keen eye detects the precious gold which cost Him Calvary, and is capable of becoming his ornament of beauty for ever.

"Through the test of sharp distresses, Those whom Heaven most richly blesses, For its joys are purified."

Ezekiel 23:22 I will raise up thy lovers against thee, and bring them against thee on every side.

It is one sign of the revolution that the teaching of Jesus has made, that the imagery of this chapter is foreign to our modes of thought.

Spiritual unfaithfulness is constantly described under metaphors borrowed from the marriage relationship. If the soul wanders from God, He is depicted as the husband in whose heart the fire of jealousy burns; while the soul is compared to a truant wife. In the text quoted above, the analogy is followed still further; and the prophet asserts that it is impossible for us to be always satisfied with the lovers that we have chosen, and that our chastisement for wandering will probably come through their agency.

There is no lack of practical illustration of this. If a Christian choose worldly prosperity, or his own reputation, or any earthly object apart from God, it is through this that he will suffer. The things that he has loved will be raised up against him, just as Israel, that had dallied with Babylon, was carried into captivity to Babylon. Of sinful and forbidden pleasure God will make whips of scorpions by which to drive us back to Himself.

What a light, by force of contrast, is cast on those rapturous words of the apostle, when he tells us that we may be married to that glorious Man, even to Him that was raised from the dead! The soul stands by to see Him die, bathed in tears; but as she beholds Him rise, she is divinely attracted to Him, conscious of a profound affinity, which engrosses and absorbs her being. Nothing will satisfy her then but union with his Spirit. She reckons herself dead to all the old lovers, through the body of Christ, but for ever alive unto Him.

Ezekiel 24:18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died.

It was a sudden stroke which befell the prophet's home. In the morning the desire of his eyes was present to care for him, and in the even she had passed away. It is the practice of the Eastern mourner to give vent to heart-rending cries; in his case these were forbidden. He might sigh, but not aloud (r.v.). There was to be no mourning for the dead, neither tears, nor fasting, because his work was to engross him; the needs of the people preponderated over personal anguish; and he was called to set forth in his own reticence the solemn, tearless anguish with which Israel would go into captivity.

We are reminded of the words of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 7, that those who had wives should be as though they had none; those that wept as though they wept not; because the time was short, and the fashion of the world was passing away.

In every human experience there are times when the personal must be subordinated to the national and universal. We must choke back our sobs, crush down our almost uncontrollable emotion, preserve a calm and tranquil exterior, that we may devote ourselves more earnestly and continuously to the crying need of others. There is nothing nobler than the self-restraint which anoints the head and washes the face, that it may have leisure from itself to do its life-work, and to press to its bosom those who are suffering around. There was a pretty illustration of this in a recent railway accident, when a little girl, badly hurt, insisted on being cared for last.

"Yet not in solitude! if Christ anear me Waketh Him workers for the great employ! Oh, not in solitude! if souls that hear me Catch from my joyance the surprise of joy."

Ezekiel 25:8, 9 Because Moab and Seir say, Judah is like unto all the nations, therefore behold...

It is a remarkable fact that the Hebrew prophets were such keen politicians in the best sense. They were always watching and interpreting the dealings of God in contemporary history. Mention of Moab and Seir is almost as frequent as of Jerusalem. I remember the saintly Professor Reynolds saying, as he opened the morning paper, "Let us see what our heavenly Father is doing in the world."

As our enemies behold the children of God, they are apt to suppose that there is no difference between them and others. They cannot see the Divine environment within which they live, and they suppose that they can easily work their will. They say, Behold these people are like other people; we have but to stretch out our hand, and can spoil them as a boy the nests of spring. Then they discover that they have another to reckon with, and that God will arise to plead the cause of his people and to execute judgment upon their oppressors. Not in vain did He say to Abraham, and through him to all that believe: "I will bless him that blesseth thee, and curse him that curseth thee." "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."

We must not presume on this. Strong as God is on our behalf towards our enemies, He is equally so within the circle of his household. He will not let others hurt us, but He will not spare his children. He may use others as his rod, just as at certain epochs of their national history He used Moab or Edom. But when the work of refining is done, He will lay the instruments aside, and even punish, if there has been an excess of malice. O child of God, thy privilege and responsibility are immeasurable. Thou art not as others.

Ezekiel 26:21 Though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God.

Tyre, to the world of her age, was what Venice was in the Middle Ages, and London today. She was strong in the sea; the carrying trade of the world was in her hands. Carthage, which was able to conflict with Rome, was her daughter; and the coasts of Cornwall were visited by her merchant vessels. In the days of Ezekiel she was a proud and populous city. But the prophet predicted her approaching fall. Her songs would cease; her walls would be overwhelmed in the floods of armed men; and the rocks on which she stood would be as bare as before a fisherman's hut was built on them. And as the prophet anticipates the future, he says that her site would be sought in vain; a prediction so literally fulfilled that it is only of late years that careful research has been able to pronounce where Tyre stood.

This chapter seems to underlie the description given in the Apocalypse of the fall of Babylon, when the mighty angel shall take up a stone, like a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea; when all human voices shall cease from her vast solitudes, and the grinding of the mill-stone shall be for ever silent. So shall perish every false system; all mere traditionalism and ritualism; all that savours of human pride; all the blandishments and impurities of the unfaithful Church, which sought to turn men's hearts from God.

What a contrast to this are the words of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 50:20): "In those days the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." Refuse the love of God, and you are doomed; you will leave no enduring record. Trust in Him, and your sins will be blotted out as if they had never been.

Ezekiel 27:26 The east wind hath broken thee in the heart of the seas.

In this splendid chapter the prophet describes Tyre under the image of one of her own merchant vessels. Looking at it simply as a piece of composition, what an extreme interest there is in this enumeration of the various races which were subject to this mighty city, and the lands from which she drew her supplies! We are reminded of the far-spreading colonies of the Anglo-Saxon race. We can almost hear the noise of her construction in the earlier verses, and see fine linen hoisted as her sail, whilst she is manned and piloted by her statesmen. Heavily laden with the choice merchandise of the East, she sails the seas, independent of the winds of heaven, because the galley slaves toil at treble banks of oars on either side. But their rowing brings her into great waters; she encounters the east wind, which breaks her in the heart of the sea; and in one day, pilots, rowers, men of war, and merchandise, are lost — all brought to silence in the midst of the sea. What a powerful conception of the great ship sinking in silence with all on board! One cry; the waves meet over her; and only a floating spar tells where she sank.

So is it with many a life. The whole world is laid under contribution for its outfit. Bashan, Chittim, Egypt, bring their quota; and to all appearance, as it glides from its stocks upon the sea of life, a fair voyage awaits it, and large exchange of the wares of human industry and thought. But where Christ is not the Pilot, and his Word not the chart, the rowers bring it into great waters, and it is broken by the east wind. O mariner! see to it that Christ is on board; for He only can still the tempest and speak peace, and guide thee out of the great waters.

Ezekiel 28:12 Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.

The magnificent words of this chapter cannot be applicable merely to Tyre. Behind that mighty city the prophet beheld its Prince, the anointed cherub that covereth (Ezekiel 28:14); and on further investigation this can only be the prince of the power of the air, who, our Lord says, is also the prince of this world. When he was created he was perfect in his ways, till unrighteousness was found in him (Ezekiel 28:15). But he was cast out of heaven, when his heart was lifted up (Ezekiel 28:17). He said, I am God; but as he met in conflict the Son of Man, he learned his absolute inferiority.

This association of a comity with an evil spirit is not confined to this chapter only. It is a frequent allusion of the Scriptures. For instance, Daniel describes the Prince of Persia as hindering the advent of Gabriel to succor the chosen people: whilst the apostle Paul distinctly attributes the darkness of the world to the wicked spirits in the heavenlies. Without doubt, the same thought underlies the present magnificent apostrophe. And this is such an encouragement to prayer; because from our knees we may affect the balance of power in the heavenlies by the weight of our intercessions.

All through this chapter runs the contrast between the fallen cherub, the patron saint of Zidon, and Jehovah the God of Israel. In the collision between these two, the might of the devil was shown to be a shadow; and his votaries were ashamed and astonished at his impotence to defend them. For us there is blessed significance in this subject. Greater is He that is for us than he that is against us. The last Adam hath stood in the conflict in which the first Adam fell. None shall prevail against us in Him.

Ezekiel 29:20 I have given him the land of Egypt,... because they wrought for Me.

The king of Babylon was sent against Tyre. The siege lasted long, and his army suffered great privations. Scorching heat above, and the heavy burdens on their shoulders, made every head bald and every shoulder peal. For this great service he was to be recompensed with the gift of the land of Egypt, because he had wrought God's purpose.

The words quoted above suggest the thought, that though we do not merit anything of God by our service, yet He does not forget our work of faith and labor of love when it is wrought for Him. If He gave Egypt to a heathen king for his service in respect to Tyre, we may also expect Him to bestow a reward on those who have built gold, silver, and precious stones, into his holy temple. The servant who has made his five talents into ten, shall be rewarded with ten cities. Those who have watched and waited through the long night shall be rewarded with special honor in the bridal feast. God will give to us some guerdon for our toils, some prize for our conflict, some token of his favor, which will be all of grace and yet proportionate to the work wrought for Him.

The transference of countries from one sovereign power to another may appear to be only the result of political combinations, or superior armies. "Providence is on the side of the strongest battalions," Napoleon said; and the remark is consistent with man's ordinary way of thinking. But here the prophet withdraws the veil, and shows the fulfillment of the Divine purpose, as Egypt comes under the power of the king of Babylon. As we look over the world, how vast are the changes which are passing over it, preparing for Christ's Gospel.

Ezekiel 30:25 When I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon.

The emphasis is on the word my. The punishment inflicted by the king of Babylon on Egypt was directly from God; it was his sword in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 30:10). How little the historian of that time realized that there was anything more in the expedition of Babylon against Egypt than the natural rivalry of these two great nations. But the eye of the inspired seer saw that Babylon was the executor of the Divine decree.

Very often events and people carry the sword of God, or his rod, which to the natural eye seem to emanate by chance, or by the malice of men. God's chastisements are very real. It is probable that no child of God sins knowingly against the Divine order without being chastised. Sometimes the natural consequences of our sins, at other times misfortunes in our circumstances, or the alienation of our friends, make the scourge of small cords by which our souls are taught the bitterness of any way but God's.

Are you undergoing chastisement? Do not regard the human agent with any feeling but of love and pity; do not expend your strength in resistance and threatening; do not faint when you are rebuked but lie still at the feet of God, receiving meekly the strokes, and thankful that He loves you well enough to take such pains. Thus the bitter discipline will produce the fruits of righteousness which are to the praise and glory of God. Never forget to distinguish between chastisement and punishment. The one is for the child; the other for the rebel. Chastisement we may bear; but the punishment of our sin has been for ever borne by Jesus Christ. Oh, do not call your self Marah! If you only understood God's way, it would be Naomi.

Ezekiel 31:17 They ... that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen.

Whatever may be the primary meaning of these words, they have a very blessed application to those who have gone forth, from so many Christian families, into heathen lands. For no choice of their own, and simply in obedience to their King's command, hundreds of our sons and daughters have gone forth to dwell in the midst of the heathen. They have taken up their home amid conditions which they would not have chosen, had it not been for the constraining love of Christ, and the imperative need of dying men; and

as fond relatives and friends regard their lot from a distance, they are often filled with anxious forebodings. May they not be involved in some sudden riot and sacrificed to a frenzy of hate! May not the sanitary conditions and methods of life be seriously detrimental to their health or morals? "Oh, if only I could be there," you sigh.

Hush! Christ is there; as near them as He is to you, casting over them the shadow of his presence, beckoning them to his secret place. He is the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land; or like the canopy of cloud that hovered over the camp of Israel by day, screening it from the torrid glare. Do not fear to trust your loved ones to the immortal Lover, who fainteth not, neither is weary. The hand that would harm is arrested and paralyzed when it attempts to penetrate that safe enclosure.

"God is never so far off as even to be near: He is within! Our spirit is the home He holds most dear. To think of Him as by our side, is almost as untrue As to remove his throne beyond those skies of starry blue; So all the while I thought myself homeless, forlorn, and weary, Nursing my joy, I walked the earth — myself God's sanctuary."

Ezekiel 32:1, 17 The word of the Lord came unto me, saying:

We often bring our words to God, without being equally eager to receive his to us. Probably his word often comes to us when we are too engaged to hear it, or because our ear is not anointed and purged. Tennyson used to boast of his power of detecting a bat's shrill scream, which comparatively few can catch. So it is not every child of God that can be still or quick enough to detect the whisper of his small soft voice. When it does come, breaking in through the many voices that fill heart and life, we do well, as Ezekiel did, carefully to mark the days as memorable, writing on the tablet of our heart, "On this day God spake to my soul."

We do well to observe special days in our diary of the years. The day of our conversion or consecration; the day of deliverance from overwhelming trouble; the day when He summoned us to some new duty; the day when Paradise shone around us with its golden sheen. Even Paul recorded, amid his busy life, that day when he was caught up into the third heaven.

Let us invite these Divine confidences. Let us fall on our face while God talks with us. Let us be on the outlook lest his invitations are not responded to. Let us address our heavenly Bridegroom in the words of the Song of Songs: "Let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice." Then, though we sleep, our heart will wake; and we shall recognize the voice of our Beloved, as He waits at the door, saying, "Open to Me, my sister, my love, my undefiled." Ah, who shall fathom the confidences that are exchanged when the word of the Lord thus comes to us? But be sure that it will cease, directly we hear, but fail to obey. Humility and obedience are essential.

Ezekiel 33:33 Then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

The people looked on Ezekiel's ministrations as a delightful diversion. They regarded him as one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument, and gathered around him with apparent eagerness and devotion. With their mouth they were profuse in expressions of love and admiration; but they had no idea of the weight and worth of his words. They looked only on the beauty of his expressions, without penetrating to the spiritual depth and meaning they contained. But when once his warnings had taken effect, and his predictions had been fulfilled, they would know that he had been something more than a sweet singer, and that there had been a prophet among them.

We do not realize the true worth of God's gifts till they are gone from us never to be recalled. That friendship was grateful and pleasing to the sense; but we did not gauge the true worth of our friend. That opportunity of hearing God's word from the lips of an honored minister was frittered away in casual criticisms on his manners and gestures, instead of being employed for hearing God's word from his lips. That incident in our life touched us by its outward features only; but we failed to receive the profound lesson it was intended to convey. Alas, so often when the prophet has gone, we realize what he was, and what we have missed!

Let us be more careful to look into the heart of the circumstances and people around us; to ponder deeply the meaning of all that God puts into our lives; to penetrate below the surface to the eternal and divine, which are not far beneath. The veil between us and the Eternal Presence-chamber is as thin and delicate as the walls of our hearts.

Ezekiel 34:15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.

It is perfectly impossible to make sheep lie down unless they are satisfied or free from alarm. When the flocks lie deep in the rich pasture lands, it is because they have eaten to the full, and are quiet from fear of evil. When, therefore, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls promises that He will so deal with us as to cause us to lie down, He undertakes to fulfill in our life these two conditions.

The Lord Jesus brings us into a good pasture, and causes us to feed in a fat pasture upon the mountains of fellowship, transfiguration, and far-reaching vision. Listen as He cries, "Eat, yea, eat abundantly, O beloved." Our restlessness arises from our refusal to obey his loving invitation to come and dine. We do not read our Bibles enough, or feed on his flesh, or drink his blood. Let us look at the Scriptures as the green pastures; and as we open them let us ask Him to be our guide, and to show us where the food appropriate to our need is to be found.

The Lord Jesus does more. He makes with us a covenant of peace; and even if the evil beasts do not cease out of the land, He so assures us that we can dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. He intends that we should be safe in Immanuel's land; that the bonds of our yoke should be broken; and that we should be delivered out of the hands of those who serve themselves of us.

O child of God, be less dependent on people and circumstances! Deal more constantly at first hand with Jesus. Regard Him as your Shepherd; "He maketh to lie down." Rejoice that He the Lord your God is with you, and that the shadowing woods, the mighty mountains, and the stream-watered vales are equally beneath his power and care.

Ezekiel 35:10 Whereas the Lord was there.

Listen to the plottings of Mount Seir, waiting until Nebuchadnezzar has dispossessed Israel of their land, and with the fixed intention of entering upon its inheritance. These two nations, says the foe, and these two countries shall be mine. The children of Israel are in captivity in Habor and Gozan; the children of Judah at Babylon. What is there to prevent my entering upon their lands? But Jehovah Shammah, the Lord, was in possession; He was there.

What inspiration this is! How often do our foes plot against us, supposing that we shall fall an easy prey, and that they can divide the spoils without let. But God is there. God is in the heart, holding for Himself that which He redeemed. God is in that bed-chamber of mortal anguish and of long waiting. God is in that home which appears besieged by every kind of misfortune. O foot of the foe, thou shalt not intrude! O might of the foe, thou shalt not prevail! God is in possession! Though there seems nothing to prevent the complete over-running of the land, the mailed forces of the enemy shall break on the invisible bulwarks of the Divine presence.

Jehovah Shammah! That hallows every spot, consecrates every act, invests the meanest believer with transcendent worth, is our buttress against attack, and our glory in the midst. For God to be in the soul is the secret of its holiness, of its persistence in the heavenly way, and of its ultimate triumph over all the power of the adversary. Be sure that He is willing to become all this for you also, O weakest and most helpless man! When the Stronger than the strong is in possession, how safe his goods!

Ezekiel 36:8 Ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people.

Very magnificent is this address to the mountains of Israel. At the moment the prophet spoke they were lying waste, and the people of Idumea were plotting to possess them; but this chapter reiterates the assurance that they should be tilled, sown, and possessed.

It seems to me as though these words may be addressed to desolate hearts that are suffering from heartrending grief. Whereas they were once full of mirth, they are now desolate and lonely. The light of their eyes has departed; the voice that made music is still; the presence that filled the home is gone. Is such your case? Behold, God will do better unto you than at your beginnings, and the old estates shall be apportioned and inherited. Bind this promise to your heart; the desolate land shall be tilled, and they shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden, and the wastes are inhabited (Ezekiel 36:34, 35). Do you think that you will never be glad again; that shadow will always lie athwart your path; and that desolation shall hold undisputed empire? It shall not be so. O desolate mountains, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield fruit; and it is near to come.

But before these promises can be realized, you must let your sorrow work to its full result in the purification and sanctification of your heart. Great trouble has been allowed to come that you might know the vanity and evil of your own heart, and be led to claim the promises of Ezekiel 36:25, 26, 27, 28, 29. They are exceeding great and precious. Note specially the words, "In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, the wastes shall be built, and the desolate land tilled" (Ezekiel 36:33, 34).

Ezekiel 37:4, 9 Prophecy over these bones... Prophecy unto the wind.

This is our double office, as servants of God. We are to prophesy to earth and heaven; to man and God. There are some who forget the second of these injunctions, and their work fails of its highest result. When they speak, bones "come together, bone to bone"; there is a stir in the graves of death and corruption; a coming together of the people to hear the word; and in many cases all the appearance of a new life. The flesh comes up and skin covers them above; but (and how fatal is the admission which this but introduces) there is no breath in them. It is clear that no amount of human persuasiveness or oratory can secure the true regeneration of the soul. That which is born of the flesh may be galvanized by the energy of the flesh into the appearance of spiritual life, but it will always remain flesh.

When you have done your best, and have failed of the highest results, prophesy to the Spirit; cry to the four winds, because He may come in the icy north wind of tribulation, or the warm west wind of prosperity; but speak with the certain assurance of, "Thus saith the Lord God: Come!" There is a sense in which the believer has the privilege of commanding the Spirit of God. "Concerning the works of my hands, command ye Me." When you obey the law of a force, the force will obey you; and when you yield utterly and humbly to God, the power of God will answer the summons of your faith.

Even while you are speaking, let your heart be in the attitude of expectancy; and according to your faith, it shall be done unto you. If you cannot go forth to witness or prophesy, let your prayer arise to God like a fountain day and night, that his Spirit may breathe on the slain.

Ezekiel 38:3 Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. (r.v.)

It is startling to meet with these three names, which are found in modern maps as Russia, Moscow, and Tobolsk, and to feel that we may be reading words that are shortly coming to pass. So far as we can see, they have not as yet been fulfilled. Within the hearing of the present generation, Russia may resolve to go up to the land of unwall'd villages, such as those that abound in Palestine, and may be challenged by the merchants of Tarshish in the far West. Some have even found an allusion to the English standard in the reference to the young lions of Ezekiel 38:13.

The shrewdest among us cannot guess what may await the world in the near future. Peer as we may into the dim mist, we cannot descry the events which are coming upon the earth. But we may be thankful that we have this word of prophecy, to which we "do well to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place." It is like the illustrated railway-table, which contains a list of the stations through which we must pass ere we reach the terminus. And as the porters call out the names, and we find that they correspond to the route as detailed on the tables, we come to place more implicit trust in our guide-book, and to count with absolute certainty on our ultimate emergence at our destination. "When ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that He is nigh, even at the doors" In the meanwhile let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning, and ye as those that wait for their Lord.

"Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices Shout to the saints, and to the deaf and dumb! Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices, Glad in his coming, who hath sworn, 'I come.'"

Ezekiel 39:25 Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon Israel.

We must never overlook the literal significance of this promise. All Israel, insists the apostle of the Gentiles, who never lost his love for his own people, shall be saved. The blindness which has happened to them is only till the fullness of the Gentile contingent to the one Church has been brought in. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The covenant made to their fathers cannot be annulled.

But all bringing again must originate in God. The sheep can only wander on, further and further from the fold, ever deeper into the dark mountains; it will never find its way back: if it shall see the fold again, it will be because the shepherd goes after it until he finds it.

Our natural bias is altogether away from God. The pole of our life is aslant from the pole-star. Our natural tendency is to vanity, corruption, and chaos. If God were to withdraw Himself, however slightly, from the natural world, it would revert to the darkness and confusion of its earliest stages; and whenever God is absent from our moral life, there is the natural and inevitable reversion to the original Adam-type. But God is rich in mercy, in neutralizing the effects of our evil nature. He calls us back to Himself; nay, He comes after us, and brings again our captivity for his name's sake. Are you in captivity to evil habits from which you cannot break loose; to evil associations from which you cannot free yourself; to circumstances that shut you in as iron bars? Have you come to an end of your efforts for liberty, finding the more you struggle the more deeply you involve yourself in the close-woven meshes? Then look away to the Lord God, plead his promises, ask Him to remember his holy name, and He will bring you again.

Ezekiel 40:4 Declare all that thou seest.

We are called to be God's witnesses, beholding the visions of God, and bearing witness to our brethren of what we have seen, tasted, and handled, of the Word of Life. When the city is draped in mist and gloom, the artist takes his portfolio and climbs into the high mountain of vision. He beholds there the crystalline beauty of the unsullied snow; the roseate hues of sunrise and sunset; the heaped magnificence of the glaciers, with their blue depth. Transferring his visions to his canvas, he returns to this lower sphere, and exhibits his picture on the walls of some public gallery, from which it silently witnesses to one of shy Nature's coyest moods. But the passers-by are apt to accuse him of extravagance. Ah, but they have not stood where he stood, or seen what he has beheld! It is thus in Divine things also.

God often leads his children into startling and unexpected experiences. They are troubled on every side; bereft of dear ones; deprived of health or property; compelled to pass through the scorching fires of slander, misunderstanding, and temptation. But these are the times when they should set their hearts on all that is being shown, to see the way by which God is leading them; the comfort with which He is comforting them; the help in which He is environing them. They have been brought to these experiences that they may know themselves, and God, and his ways of dealing with his people; and may be able to declare what they have been taught, to the intent that unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies may be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God. No vision is for private advantage and jubilation only; declare it all.

Ezekiel 41:1 He brought me to the Temple, and measured.

This is the pattern of an ideal Temple, which was presented in thought to the prophet's mind, as the pattern of the Tabernacle was shown to Moses on the Mount. It is interesting to notice the minute measurements and specifications — even to the ornaments of cherubim and palm trees. We cannot but remember that the plan of our life is also worked out before the face of God, and that we shall live to the best purpose when we make all things according to the pattern shown us on the Mount of Prayer and Vision.

Ever remember to look upward to God's pattern, and do nothing except what He reveals as his will for you; whilst careful to omit nothing that has been prepared for you to say or do. Look up, child of God; look into the plan of your temple-building. The holy places of prayer; the altars of your sacrifice and consecration; the tables of your fellowship; the doors that lead out to work, and open into chambers of pain and suffering; the length and breadth of each; the ornamentation to be chased upon your soul — all, all are fixed. Let your one aim be that God's will for you should be realized in you; and dare to believe that, if only you will yield to Him, He will work out in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, to whom shall be the glory for ever and ever.

Only remember three rules:—(1) Keep your eye directed outwards and upwards, to Christ exalted in the glory. (2) Be careful to maintain the silence of the Sabbath-rest within—rest from your own thoughts and ways. (3) Do not be always speaking of God as having said or shown this or that: let men form their own conclusions.

Ezekiel 42:13 The priests that are near unto the Lord shall eat the most holy things. (r.v.)

Every believer is a priest unto God. He may not exercise his priesthood; but when he was washed from his sins in the blood of the Lamb, he was constituted a priest unto God, even the Father. We are called, not to offer propitiatory sacrifices—there is no need for this, since Jesus when He died offered the one sufficient oblation for the sins of the world—but to present ourselves living sacrifices, to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, and to do good and communicate of our substance to the help of others.

Are you near unto the Lord? Hath He chosen you to stand before Him, and know his will, and hear the word from his mouth? Then most certainly you will often enter into the inner chamber to eat of the most holy things. These are enumerated as the meat-offering, the sin-offering, and the guilt-offering. We must have fellowship with God in his joy over the spotless character and lovely human life of Jesus, which may be compared to fine flour. We must have fellowship in the atoning death of our Substitute; feeding on all the sacred meaning of the wondrous Cross. We must avail ourselves of Jesus as our guilt-offering; making propitiation for our mistakes, negligences, and infirmities (Leviticus 2; 4; 5).

If you would be near to God, feed on the work of Jesus; if you are near to God, you cannot live without it. To muse on the propitiatory aspects of the death of Jesus is as necessary for the strength of our inner life as food is to the body. Let us beware of imitating the mistake of Leviticus 10:16, 17, 18, 19, 20; and let us be very careful to eat of the wave-breast and the heave-thigh, which stand for the love of Jesus for our affections, and the might of Jesus for our strength (Leviticus 10:14).

Ezekiel 43:2-7 Behold, the glory of the Lord filleth the house.

At the beginning of this book (Ezekiel 9 and 10) we beheld the departure of the Shekinah cloud from the doomed temple. But now, to the new reconstructed temple it returns. So will God shed the sense of his presence through our hearts. We may have grieved Him, and lost it by defiling his holy name, and by the abominations which we have committed. But if we will resolutely put away our unfaithfulness, our coquetting with the world, our tampering with the flesh, He will return and dwell in our midst for ever. Behold, the glory of the Lord will fill the inner shrine of our spirit, and the earth will shine with his glory.

“Heaven above is softer blue; Earth beneath in sweeter green; Something shines in every hue Christless eyes have never seen.”

There is a very precious promise connected with the Divine return and indwelling: “I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and they shall no more defile my holy name” (Ezekiel 43:7). Be willing to admit God, and He will come. “If any man open the door, I will come in.” Whenever God comes He will make the old sin abhorrent and impossible; and his indwelling will not be transient and fitful, but permanent and efficient. “They shall no more defile.”

This is what we need. We cannot have holiness apart from the Holy One. The attribute may not be divorced from its possessor. But to the soul that desires holiness, the holy God comes, and infills, and keeps; so that darkness cannot intrude on the domain of light, nor hate on love, nor death on life. Has the Shekinah left thee? Lo, it returns by the way it went, and thine earthly life shall shine again.

Ezekiel 44:28 I am their inheritance... I am their possession.

These injunctions for the priests, the Levites, that keep the charge of the sanctuary, are full of suggestion to those who have been made priests to God and the Father. It is for us to enter into the Holy Place, to come near his table to minister unto his Father, and

to keep his charge (Ezekiel 44:16), always remembering that we need the sin-offering whenever we approach God (Ezekiel 44:27). However holy a man becomes, as the revelation of God's perfect holiness breaks upon him, there is need to shelter beneath the blood that was shed.

But when these features of our ministry have been realized, we have a right to look on God as our inheritance and possession. How wonderful that in a deep sense we may obtain supplies of Divine help from our fellowship with God! To follow out the literal comparison of an inheritance would suggest that as the peasant proprietors of Palestine raised crops on their lands, so we may obtain, by prayer and faith, out of the very heart of God, all things that are needful for life and godliness.

We possess God as the flower the sunlight; as a babe the mother. All his resources are placed at our disposal. The seed cast into the ground immediately begins to take from earth and air the nutriment of its life, and we have the same power of deriving from the infinite fullness of God all that shall make us pure and strong and gentle. Ours are the unsearchable riches of Christ; we are made full through the fullness which God the Father has been pleased to make dwell in Him. All the resources which have been placed at his disposal in his ascension and eternal reign are gifts which He holds for men. Alas for us that we fail to possess our possessions!

Ezekiel 45:20 And so shalt thou do for every one that erreth, and for him that is simple.

A very touching provision is here. When the services of the newly constituted temple were in full operation, and the priests were performing the usual rites in all the pomp and splendor of their ceremonial on the behalf of all righteous and godly souls, there was to be special thought of the erring and simple; for these two characters a special offering was made. Perhaps the erring were too hardened and the simple too obtuse to bring an offering for themselves; but they were not forgotten. The blood of the sin-offering was to be placed on the posts of the house and on the posts of the gate of the inner court, each seventh day of the month, on their behalf.

Whenever we draw around the altar of God, whether in the home or church, we should remember the erring and simple. If a family misses from its ranks one erring member, its prayer and thought are more directed towards that one than to those that have not gone astray. Does not the child who is deficient in its intellect attract more loving care than those who are able to care for themselves? Should it be otherwise in God's home? Was it not for erring Peter that Jesus prayed? Was it not for Thomas that He made another special visit to the upper room? Does not the Great Shepherd gently lead those that are with young? And in so far as we enter into God's mind, we, too, shall care for the ignorant and those who are out of the way.

There is room for all such in the Father's House—a warm welcome and ample provision. Like Samuel's words about David, so God speaks of the most inconspicuous members of his family, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither."

Ezekiel 46:10 The Prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in.

These are regulations for ingress and egress in the temple which Ezekiel describes; but we may be pardoned for finding a true and tender thought of the new relationship of Christ and his own.

We, too, go in, to find pasture within the precincts of the fold; to worship in the Holy Place, to get refreshment and strength; as when Jonathan and David met in the wood and strengthened each other's hands in God. On the Lord's Day especially we go in where the seraphim stand around the sapphire throne. But of what avail is it to go in, unless our Prince accompanies us? His presence makes the feast; his company is as sunlight to nature; to hear his voice, to feel the touch of his hand, to sit in his near proximity—this is the bread of life divine.

But there are times when we must go forth; we must leave the transfiguration mount for the valley. The bugle-note rings out in the starry dawn, and tells us that the foe is approaching. The look-out watch calls from the mast-head that the enemies' ships are in view. There is work to be done, suffering borne, difficulty encountered. But when we go forth, our Prince and we shall go forth together (r.v.).

He never puts his sheep forth without going before them. He never thrusts us into the fight without preceding us. If we have to take the way of the Cross, we may always count on seeing Him go first, though we follow Him amazed.

No ascent so steep that we cannot see his form in advance; no stones so sharp that are not flecked with his blood; no fire so intense that One does not go beside us, whose form is like the Son of God; no waters so deep that Emmanuel does not go beside us.

Ezekiel 47:9 Everything shall live wither the river cometh.

The great need of the world is life. Not more intelligence or activity, but life, and fuller life—life more abundant, life in full tide; the life which is life indeed, the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to the world. Of that life, this river is the emblem. It issues from the throne of God. It ever tends to become fuller and deeper. It becomes finally too mighty to be crossed. The course

of the river of the prophet's vision was due east, to the Arabah, a desert waste, and the Dead Sea, in whose dark, brackish waters no fish can live; but as even these are smitten by the crystal tide, a wonderful change takes place — they are healed, and begin to abound with fish, and fishers stand beside it from Engedi to En-eglaim.

This has been the course of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ever since the river of the water of life issued from the Cross it has been deepening and extending, bringing life and beauty into the waste and barren wilderness of the world. The transforming effects of the Gospel on continents and islands, on vast multitudes of men, can be compared to nothing less than the fertilizing effect of a mighty river. Flow on, great sea of God, until all the Dead Sea of sin is swept away before thy beneficent waters!

But chiefly we want this more abundant life within us. Are there no Dead Seas, no marshes, no waste stretches of desert sands? Is there not urgent need that the lengthening out of our days should see a deepening of the river until it rise beyond our depths? We need the ankle-depths of walking to be exchanged for the knee-depths of praying; and these for the loin-depths of perfect purity; and these for the length, depth, breadth, and height of the love of Christ.

Ezekiel 48:35 The Lord is there. (See also Jehovah Shammah)

Ezekiel has in view an ideal city; whether in any material form it is to be realized, we must wait to see. But this shall be its prominent characteristic, that God will be there. A great voice will be heard out of heaven, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

There is comfort in this for the sorrowful; because where God is, there cannot be sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. No cypress-trees line the streets of that city; no dirge intrudes upon the glad ascription of praise; no sob or groan is possible.

There is comfort for far-dissevered friends; for where God is, the center and goal and home, all his children meet. Back from distant lands and spheres they come; home from the school where they have been taught; back from the voyage; back from the military camp; back from the tour of exploration. The gates stand open to admit to his heart; and that heart is the rendezvous of those who have come out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people-never again to be parted.

There is comfort for the doubting and perplexed. Here, night often reigns over the heart of Thomas and the mind of Mary. Truly devoted souls grope by candle-light, and sometimes they walk in darkness and have no light, learning to walk by faith. But there all mysteries will be unraveled, all problems solved, every question answered; there will be no night, no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the lamp thereof.