

EZEKIEL

Introduction

His life

We do not know the date of his birth. Being from a priestly family, he surely received his formation in the Temple, where he most probably officiated until the time of the Exile. In Exile he receives the prophetic vocation, making him a kind of a younger brother to Jeremiah: both are the interpreters of tragedy, in the Motherland and in Exile.

His activity is divided into two stages by a violent break. The first stage lasts about seven years, until the fall of Jerusalem. His job there is to systematically destroy the false hope. The fall of Jerusalem seals the validity of his prophesies. A time of forced silence follows. The prophet begins the second stage: while undermining all hope in human powers, he asserts the judgment of God in History. Only afterwards begins to appear a new hope, founded only in the grace and fidelity of God.

His work

The same happens here as with the other prophets: the book of Ezekiel is not fully the work of Ezekiel. Firstly, because his literary activity is oral, made for recitation, divulged by the prophet and his disciples. What today we know as the book of Ezekiel is the work of his school.

Reading this book we should discover above all the dynamism of a divine action that, through the deserved cross of the people, a pure gift of resurrection will follow.

Theophany

1 ¹On the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year when I was with the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens opened and I had visions from Yahweh.

²On the fifth of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakin).

Vocation

2 ¹He said to me:

—Son of man, stand up for I am about to speak to you.

²A spirit came upon me as he spoke and kept me standing and then I heard him speak:

³—Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a people who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have sinned against me to this day. ⁴Now I am sending you to these defiant and stubborn people to tell them ‘this is the Lord Yahweh’s word.’ ⁵So, whether they listen or not this set of rebels will know there is a prophet among them. ⁶But you, son of man, do not fear them or what they say, for they will be as thorns for you and you will be sitting on a nest of scorpions. Don’t be afraid of their words when you are facing this set of rebels. ⁷Tell them what I say whether they choose to listen or not, for they are rebels. ⁸Listen then, son of man, to what I say and don’t be a rebel among rebels. Open your mouth and take in what I’m about to say.

⁹I looked and saw a hand stretched out in front of me holding a scroll. ¹⁰He unrolled it before me; on both sides were written lamentations, groanings and woes.

The prophet as sentinel

3 ¹⁶After seven days the word of Yahweh came to me:

¹⁷—Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the House of Israel. With the word you hear from my mouth you will warn them in my name. ¹⁸When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ if you do not speak to warn the wicked man to give up his evil ways and so live, he shall die for his sin, and I will hold you responsible for his death. ¹⁹But if you have warned the wicked man and he has not given up his wickedness and evil ways, he shall die for his sin but you will save yourself. ²⁰When the righteous man turns from what is good to do evil I shall put an obstacle in his path: he shall die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. His good deeds will not be remembered and I shall hold you responsible for his death. ²¹But when you have warned the righteous man to keep him from sinning and he has not sinned, he will live for sure for he was warned and you will save your life.

Punishment and reconciliation

36 ¹⁶The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms:

¹⁷—Son of man, when Israel occupied her own land she defiled it by her way of life and her actions. To me her conduct was like the uncleanness of a woman in her period.

¹⁸I poured out my fury on them because of the blood they shed in the land and because they defiled it with their filthy idols. ¹⁹Then I scattered them among the nations and dispersed them in other lands. I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.

²⁰But when they were brought to other nations, my holy Name was profaned because others said of them: ‘The people of Yahweh had to be exiled from his land!’ ²¹Then I was concerned for my holy Name, profaned by Israel among the nations where she had been dispersed. Now you shall say to the people of Israel:

²²—It is not for your sake that I am about to act, but because of my holy Name that you have profaned in the places where you have gone. ²³I will make known the holiness of my great Name, profaned among the nations because of you, and they will know that I am Yahweh when I show them my holiness among you.

²⁴—For I will gather you from all the nations and bring you back to your own land. ²⁵Then I shall pour pure water over you and you shall be made clean—cleansed from the defilement of all your idols. ²⁶I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I shall remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I shall put my spirit within you and move you to follow my decrees and keep my laws. ²⁸You will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you shall be my people and I will be your God.

²⁹—I will free you from all your uncleanness. I shall summon the wheat and make it plentiful and so keep famine away from you. ³⁰I shall see that the fruits of the earth and the produce of the fields are plentiful and that you no longer suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. ³¹Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked actions and loathe yourselves for the sins you committed and for your detestable practices. ³²I want you to know that it is not for your sake I am doing this, word of Yahweh. Be ashamed and humbled because of your conduct, Israel!

The bones and the spirit

37 ¹The hand of Yahweh was upon me. He brought me out and led me in spirit to the middle of the valley which was full of bones. ²He made me walk to and fro among them and I could see there was a great number of them on the ground all along the valley and that they were very dry.

³Yahweh said to me:

—Son of man, can these bones live again?

I said:

—Lord Yahweh, only you know that.

⁴He then said:

—Speak on my behalf concerning these bones; say to them:

Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh! ⁵Yahweh says: I am going to put spirit in you and make you live. ⁶I shall put sinews on you and make flesh grow on you; I shall cover you with skin and give you my spirit, that you may live. And you will know that I am Yahweh.

⁷I prophesied as I had been commanded and then there was a noise and commotion; the bones joined together. ⁸I looked and saw that they had sinews, that flesh was growing on them and that he was covering them with skin. But there was no spirit in them.

⁹So Yahweh said to me:

—Speak on my behalf and call on the Spirit, son of man! Say to the Spirit: This is the word of Yahweh: Spirit, come from the four winds. Breathe into these dead bones and let them live!

¹⁰I prophesied as he had commanded me and breath entered them; they came alive, standing on their feet—a great, immense army!

¹¹He then said to me:

—Son of man, these bones are all Israel. They keep saying: ‘Our bones are dry, hope has gone, it is the end of us.’ ¹²So prophesy! Say to them: This is what Yahweh says: I am going to open your tombs; I shall bring you out of your tombs, my people, and lead you back to the land of Israel. ¹³You will know that I am Yahweh, O my people! when I open your graves and bring you out of your graves, ¹⁴when I put my spirit in you and you live. I shall settle you in your land and you will know that I, Yahweh, have done what I said I would do.