

## **The sorting of the scrolls - Ezekiel**



I have been asked by the High Priest to sort the scrolls kept in the depository, and try to make sure that when he takes them out to read to the people, he reads the same version every time. I have already made a start. I have had some containers made and I have labelled them. I have glanced at the scrolls and divided them up. Over there I have put the scrolls of the beginnings of the people of Yahweh; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Next to those are the books of the history of my people; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles. Next to them I have put Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. I don't really know where to put Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, so they are in a pile over there for the moment. I have put the poems of our great kings David and Solomon together, so the Psalms of King David and the Song of Songs are in the corner container. The rest of the scrolls are prophecies from the darkest times of our people. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel are together there. The rest I have put together for some more sorting, let me see, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah (I like him he gets in to such a strop with Yahweh – but never mind that for now) Oh yes, there is Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, at least I think it is, the writing is so awful and last but not least Malachi. There are a few fragments which I have swept up and popped into that jar over there, which I will need to think about.

The task the High Priest has set me is not just about ordering everything so that he can find what he wants, it is also about making sure there is just one version of all the scrolls. In the past some of the scribes have been terribly careless and missed out whole chunks from the versions they were copying, and even on occasions took great liberties and added in some thoughts of their own. That has to be weeded out. We need to hear the real voice of Yahweh when we read. I have hand picked a number of scribes that I know, whom I trust, to do well, nearly as good a job as I. The High

Priest has ordered a hut to be built for us, where we can have enough light to see to read, copy and correct, and where the scrolls will be protected from the weather. I have just come over here to collect some scrolls to start. My colleagues will be over later to collect the scrolls they need. Where shall I start then? I will let Yahweh decide. Ah, this is a scroll of the prophecies of Ezekiel. Let me take it to my work table and begin.

It begins with a date, that is always good, it will enable me to tell whether these prophecies have come true or not.

*“On the fifth day of the fourth month in the thirtieth year, while I was among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw a vision of Yahweh.”*

Hm. That would mean that Ezekiel was born during the reign of King Josiah. His great claim was that he ordered the temple to be restored, as it was falling somewhat into disrepair. Hilkiah, who was the Temple Priest then, began to sort through the scrolls, as I am doing now. He found one which set out how Yahweh should be worshipped in the Temple. He took it straight to King Josiah, who read it and wept, because we had allowed the Temple to be desecrated by the worship of Baal. He ordered an immediate clearing out of the Temple, and a cleansing of the High Places, He put false priests to death, and had their bodies burnt. It was a complete cleansing of the people of Yahweh. Josiah was a great king.

I am sure I have seen another date at the beginning of another scroll. I had better sort through that container and bring back all the scrolls about Ezekiel, and put them all out so that I can see and check. I can tell that this is going to be a lifetime of work for me, just this one prophet. Ah yes, here we are;

*“On the fifth day of the month in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel bar Buzi, that is Son of Buzi, the Priest, in Chaldaea by the river Kebar and there the hand of the Lord came upon him”*

Well I know that Josiah died in 609BC at the battle of Megiddo against the Egyptians. He was succeeded briefly by his son Jehoahaz, who was deposed by the victorious Egyptian Pharaoh in favour of his older brother Jehoiakim. So let me see, he was king from 609 to 598 BC. I remember stories about him. He was not a good king. He committed all sorts of evil deeds, so it is not at all surprising that after the Babylonians beat the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish in 605BC, Jehoiakim paid the Babylonians tribute money, some of it coming from the Temple Treasury. He also allowed them to carry away the finest of the sons of our nobility to educate them in the Babylonian way. Which reminds me, I must make sure when I look at the scrolls of the Prophet Daniel, that all the dates I have here and in my head match with the ones in his account of his time in Exile in Babylon.

Well although it appears to be rather complicated I think the two dates do tie together. Oh, For the moment I will put both in and think about whether I can make it sound tidier later.

Ah the next bit of the scroll is an account of the vision that began Ezekiel's work as a prophet. How does he put it?

*"I saw, in this vision, a great storm coming toward me from the north, driving before it a huge cloud glowing with fire, with a mass of fire inside that flashed continually; and in the fire there was something that shone like polished brass.*

*Then from the centre of the cloud, four strange forms appeared that looked like men, except that each had four faces and two pairs of wings! Their legs were like those of men, but their feet were cloven like calves' feet, and shone like burnished brass. And beneath each of their wings I could see human hands.*

*The four living beings were joined wing to wing, and they flew straight forward without turning. Each had the face of a man in front, with a lion's face on the right side of his head, and the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the back! Each had two pairs of wings spreading out from the middle of his back. One pair stretched out to attach to the wings of the living beings on each side, and the other pair covered his body. Wherever their spirit went they went, going straight forward without turning.*

*Going up and down among them were other forms that glowed like bright coals of fire or brilliant torches, and it was from these the lightning flashed. The living beings darted to and fro, swift as lightning.*

*As I stared at all of this, I saw four wheels on the ground beneath them, one wheel belonging to each. The wheels looked as if they were made of polished amber, and each wheel was constructed with a second wheel crosswise inside. They could go in any of the four directions without having to face around. The four wheels had rims and spokes, and the rims were filled with eyes around their edges.*

*When the four living beings flew forward, the wheels moved forward with them. When they flew upwards, the wheels went up too. When the living beings stopped, the wheels stopped. For the spirit of the four living beings was in the wheels; so wherever their spirit went, the wheels and the living beings went there too. (Ezekiel 1:4-21 – Living Bible)*

What a wonderful vision of Yahweh in all his glory. I wish sometimes that I could see such things, have such visions to wipe away all my doubts, all my fears all my inadequacies, but that is only granted to the few. The trials that come with the visions are the prophecies, which the prophet must proclaim to the people. And they are not usually grateful for them either. Sometimes they pay with their lives. Ezekiel spent years trying to help the people become the people Yahweh wanted them to be, to clean up their lives to clean up the land from false gods. When they didn't listen he sent them into Exile to learn a lesson that although Yahweh had given them the land, he could also take it away. In exile he tried to refine and to clean to hold out a vision of a new Israel and Judah where the people would live as he wished them to live.

I wish that the last part of Ezekiel's prophecies had come true and that I was sitting in the Temple that he envisioned. It would have had structures of wood and carvings beautifully made to the descriptions Ezekiel wrote down, but it did not happen. When the Exiles returned from Babylon they began to build a Temple, beginning in 516BC.

The building I am sitting in now is a refurbishment of that building, this one ordered by King Herod. He has enlarged this Second Temple, made it beautiful with stone, made it a strong a visible reminder of the powers of Yahweh, but it is not Yahweh's gift to us, it is King Herod's gift. I know that some of the people do not value it as they should, nor the prayers and sacrifices that go on here daily. They would rebel against Rome again, and as happened before I can see this Temple being laid waste to punish all of us for allowing the few to rebel against the might of Rome. If I were a prophet I would prophecy the end of the godless Roman empire, but I am not, and only Yahweh can give and take away. He is giving us to Rome for the moment for the sins we have committed, maybe the killing of the prophet Jesus of Nazareth is part of the reason, who is to know? I must stop this speculating and return to my copying. There is just so much to do and so little time to do it in!