

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

PART FIVE: Hope Renewed!

"Uncle!" Buzi greeted Ezekiel. "It is good to see you in a good mood!"

"Thanks, Buzi," Ezekiel returned the greeting. "It is also good to see my favorite nephew," he teased.

"Hilkiah has brought bad news," Buzi confided, "His uncle has been kidnapped by the group that assassinated the new governor. He thinks that they will bring his uncle to Alexandria."

"I hope he hasn't asked Hilkiah to find him" said Ezekiel worried, "or worse, to rescue him."

"Hazak and I have been searching for him all morning," Buzi said worriedly.

"We think he has left and not told us so that we wouldn't follow him and talk him out of it," said Hazak. "But why would the assassins bring his uncle to Alexandria?"

"That is where the largest group of Jews are living other than Babylon, now that Jerusalem has been decimated," Ezekiel answered.

"Father Ezekiel, you have changed these past days," Hazak ventured.

"What do you mean, Hazak?" he asked.

"You seem more positive," Hazak said hinting. "Maybe you have been given a new vision or oracle?"

"Actually, I have been given several wonderful and hope filled-visions of the future."

"Uncle, tell him first about the 'Dry Bones'!" Buzi encouraged him.

"Oh," Hazak is captured with interest now. "When did this happen?"

"While you two were on a wild goose chase," Ezekiel said. "Hilkiah will return safely, and his uncle will be safe, for now."

"The visions," Hazak interrupted, "especially the 'Dry Bones'!"

"Neither vision will happen until the people renew themselves in the spirit of God and in the new Covenant," he began. "Unless the people here in Babylon allow the Lord God to replace their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh, it will not happen."

Now Hazak is sitting on the edge of his seat. "How does this connect with the 'Dry 'Bones'?" Hazak was trying follow.

"Patience, Hazak!" Ezekiel said. "The Lord God told me to prophesy to the breath or wind, *ruah*, as at the beginning of creation, breathing life into the body of the first human, animating Adam."

"You mean like bringing them back from the dead?" Buzi interjected.

"No!" Ezekiel emphasized. "To blow new life into the dead relationship between the people and God. The covenant has been endangered by the people's disobedience, and our unfaithfulness had virtually killed our ties to Yahweh."

"So, our Lord God is taking the initiative, a new creation through his breath..." Buzi begins.

"...to breath new live in our dead nation..." Hazak continued.

"...to revive us and re-create us anew!" Ezekiel added, pleased with the young men. "But this will only happen when the people are renewed in spirit and heart, beginning with us." Ezekiel is quiet for a while.

"Uncle," Buzi interrupts his reverie. "Tell Hazak the other vision."

"The temple will be restored!" Ezekiel coming to himself begins again.

In minute detail, Ezekiel excitedly describes the magnificent architectural design of the rebuilt temple, whose grand scale is intended to match the power and majesty of Yahweh's restorative act.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's task now was a two-fold one: first and foremost, to convince his contemporaries in Babylon that they do in fact stand before such a hope-filled future; but second, to be a watchman among them preparing them for this homeward journey. Up until this point, he had been primarily a prophet of doom to the whole nation. Now he was being summoned to function as a hope-filled caretaker of individuals. In the past judgment had fallen on the nation as a whole, but now a future full of hope lay ahead, but only for those who were worthy of it—only for those who in actuality live by Yahweh's laws and are thereby declared to be upright. Only they shall live. But it is Yahweh's desire that they shall life—every last one among them. This is Ezekiel's new, burning conviction.

At the very center of these futuristic visions is not this triumph of Israel over the surrounding nations so much as the miracle of inner renewal that will occur at this time in the community itself. Jeremiah had prophesied of this under the aspect of a new covenant with the law written upon the heart. In a very similar vein, Ezekiel speaks of inner cleansing, spiritual renewal, and a heart transplant.