

CHAPTER 33

The prophet has now come off his circuit, which he went as judge, in God's name, to try and pass sentence upon the neighbouring nations, and, having finished with them, and read them all their doom, in the eight chapters foregoing, he now returns to the children of his people, and receives further instructions what to say to them.

I. He must let them know what office he was in among them as a prophet, that he was a watchman, and had received a charge concerning them, for which he was accountable (v. 1-9). The substance of this we had before, 3:17, etc.

II. He must let them know upon what terms they stand with God, that they are upon their trial, upon their good behaviour, that if a wicked man repent he shall not perish, but that if a righteous man apostatize he shall perish (v. 10-20).

III. Here is a particular message sent to those who yet remained in the land of Israel, and (which is very strange) grew secure there, and confident that they should take root there again, to tell them that their hopes would fail them because they persisted in their sins (v. 21-29).

IV. Here is a rebuke to those who personally attended Ezekiel's ministry, but were not sincere in their professions of devotion (v. 30-33).

~~331~~ EZEKIEL 33:1-9

THE WATCHMAN'S OFFICE

The prophet had been, by express order from God, taken off from prophesying to the Jews, just then when the news came that Jerusalem was invested, and close siege laid to it, ~~327~~Ezekiel 24:27. But now that Jerusalem is taken, two years after, he is appointed again to direct his speech to them; and there his commission is renewed. If God had abandoned them quite, he would not have sent prophets to them; nor, if he

had not had mercy in store for them, would he have *shown them such things as these*. In these verses we have,

I. The office of a watchman laid down, the trust reposed in him, the charge given him, and the conditions adjusted between him and those that employ him, v. 2, 6.

1. It is supposed to be a public danger that gives occasion for the appointing of a watchman — when *God brings the sword upon a land*, v. 2. The sword of war, whenever it comes upon a land, is of God's bringing; it is the *sword of the Lord*, of his justice, how unjustly soever men draw it. At such a time, when a country is in fear of a foreign invasion, that they may be informed of all the motions of the enemy, may not be surprised with an attack, but may have early notice of it, in order to their being at their arms and in readiness to give the invader a warm reception, they *set a man of their coast*, some likely person, that lives upon the borders of their country, where the threatened danger is expected, and is therefore well acquainted with all the avenues of it, and make him *their watchman*. Thus *wise* are the *children of this world in their generation*. Note, One man may be of public service to a whole country. Princes and statesmen are the watchmen of a kingdom; they are continually to employ themselves, and, if occasion be, as watchmen, to expose themselves for the public safety.

2. It is supposed to be a public trust that is lodged in the watchman and that he is accountable to the public for the discharge of it. His business is,

(1.) To discover the approaches and advances of the enemy; and therefore he must not be blind nor asleep, for then he cannot *see the sword coming*.

(2.) To give notice of them immediately by sound of trumpet, or, as sentinels among us, by the discharge of a gun, as a signal of danger. A special trust and confidence is reposed in him by those that set him to be their watchman that he will faithfully do these two things; and they venture their lives upon his fidelity. Now,

[1.] If he do his part, if he be betimes aware of all the dangers that fall within his cognizance, and give warning of them, he has discharged his trust, and has not only *delivered his soul*, but earned his wages. If the people do not take warning, if they either will not believe the notice he gives them, will not believe the danger to be so great or so near as really it is, or will not regard it, and so are surprised by the enemy in their security,

it is their own fault; the blame is not to be laid upon the watchman, but their blood is upon their own head. If any person goes presumptuously into the mouth of danger, though he heard the sound of the trumpet, and was told by it where the danger was, and *so the sword comes and takes him away in his folly*, he is *felo de se* — a suicide; foolish man, he has *destroyed himself*. But,

[2.] If the watchman do not do his duty, if he might have seen the danger, and did not, but was asleep, or heedless, or looking another way, or if he did *see the danger* (for so the case is put here) and shifted only for his own safety, and *blew not the trumpet to warn the people*, so that some are surprised and cut off *in their iniquity* (v. 6), cut off suddenly, without having time to cry, *Lord, have mercy upon me*, time to repent and make their peace with God (which makes the matter much the worse, that the poor creature is *taken away in his iniquity*), his blood shall be required *at the watchman's hand*; he shall be found guilty of his death, because he did not *give him warning* of his danger. But if the watchman do his part, and the people do theirs, all is well; both he that gives warning and he that takes warning have delivered their souls.

II. The application of this to the prophet, v. 7, 9.

1. He is a *watchman to the house of Israel*. He had occasionally given warning to the nations about, but to the house of Israel he was a watchman by office, for they were the *children of the prophets and the covenant*. They did not *set him for a watchman*, as the people of the land, v. 2 (for they were not so wise for their souls as to secure the welfare of them, as they would have been for the protection of their temporal interests); but God did it for them; he appointed them a watchman.

2. His business as a watchman is to give warning to sinners of their misery and danger by reason of sin. This is the word he must *hear from God's mouth* and *speak to them*.

(1.) God has said, *The wicked man shall surely die*; he shall be miserable. Unless he repent, he shall be cut off from God and all comfort and hope in him, shall be cut off from all good. He shall fall and lie for ever under the wrath of God, which is the death of the soul, as his favour is its life. The righteous God has said it, and will never unsay it, nor can all the world gainsay it, that the *wages of sin is death*. *Sin, when it is finished, brings froth death*. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, not only against

wicked nations, speaking ruin to them as nations, but against wicked persons, speaking ruin to them in their personal capacity, their personal interests, which pass into the other world and last to eternity, as national interests do not.

(2.) It is the will of God that the wicked man should be warned of this: *Warn them from me.* This intimates that there is a possibility of preventing it, else it were a jest to give warning of it; nay, and that God is desirous it should be prevented. Sinners are *therefore* warned of the wrath to come, that they may *flee from it*, ~~408E~~ Matthew 3:7.

(3.) It is the work of ministers to give him warning, to say to the wicked, *It shall be ill with thee*, ~~408B~~ Isaiah 3:11. God ways in general, *The soul that sinneth it shall die.* The minister's business is to apply this to particular persons, and to say, "*O wicked man! thou shalt surely die*, whoever thou art; if thou go on still in thy trespasses, they will inevitably be thy ruin. O adulterer! O robber! O drunkard! O swearer! O sabbath-breaker! *thou shalt surely die.*" And he must say this, not in passion, to provoke the sinner, but in compassion, to *warn the wicked from hi way*, warn him to *turn from it*, that he may live. This is to be done by the faithful preaching of the word in public, and by personal application to those whose sins are open.

3. If souls perish through his neglect of his duty, he brings guilt upon himself. "If the prophet do not warn the wicked of the ruin that is at the end of his wicked way, that *wicked man shall die in his iniquity*; for, though the watchman did not do his part, yet the sinner might have taken warning from the written word, from his own conscience, and from God's judgments upon others, by which his mouth shall be stopped, and God will be justified in his destruction." Note, It will not serve impenitent sinners to plead in the great day that their watchmen did not give them warning, that they were careless and unfaithful; for, though they were so, it will be made to appear that *God left not himself without witness*. "But he shall not perish alone in his iniquity; the watchman also shall be called to an account: *His blood will I require at thy hand.* The blind leader shall fall with the blind follower into the ditch." See what a desire God has of the salvation of sinners, in that he resents it so ill if those concerned do not what they can to prevent their destruction. And see what a great deal those ministers have to answer for another day who palliate sin, and flatter sinners in their evil way, and by their wicked lives countenance and

harden them in their wickedness, and encourage them to believe that they shall have peace though they go on.

4. If he do his duty, he may take the comfort of it, though he do not see the success of it (v. 9): “*If thou warn the wicked of his way, if thou tell him faithfully what will be the end thereof, and call him earnestly to turn from it, and he do not turn, but persist in it, he shall die in his iniquity, and the fair warning given him will be an aggravation of his sin and ruin; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*” Note, It is a comfort to ministers that they may through grace save themselves, though they cannot be instrumental to save so many as they wish of those that hear them.

EZEKIEL 33:10-20

THE CAVILS OF THE PEOPLE ANSWERED

These verses are the substance of what we had before (Ezekiel 18:20, etc.) and they are so full and express a declaration of the terms on which people stand with God (as the former were of the terms on which ministers stand) that it is no wonder that they are here repeated, as those were, though we had the substance of them before. Observe here,

I. The cavils of the people against God's proceedings with them. God was now in his providence contending with them, but their uncircumcised hearts were not as yet humbled, for they were industrious to justify themselves, though thereby they reflected on God. Two things they insisted upon, in their reproaches of God, and in both they added iniquity to their sin and misery to their punishment: —

1. They quarrelled with his promises and favours, as having no kindness nor sincerity in them, v. 10. God had *set life before them*, but they plead that he had set it out of their reach, and therefore did but mock them with the mention of it. The prophet had said, some time ago (Ezekiel 24:23), *You shall pine away for your iniquities*; with that word he had concluded his threatenings against Judah and Jerusalem; and this they now upbraided him with, as if it had been spoken absolutely, to drive them to despair; whereas it was spoken conditionally, to bring them to repentance. Thus are the sayings of God's ministers perverted by men of corrupt minds, who are inclined to pick quarrels. He puts them in hopes of life and happiness; and

herein they would make him contradict himself; “for” (say they) “*if our transgressions and our sins be upon us, as thou hast often told us they are, and if we must, as thou sayest, pine away in them, and wear out a miserable captivity in a fruitless repentance, how shall we then live? If this be our doom, there is no remedy. We die, we perish, we all perish.*” Note, It is very common for those that have been hardened with presumption when they were warned against sin to sink into despair when they are called to repent, and to conclude there is no hope of life for them.

2. They quarrelled with his threatenings and judgments, as having no justice or equity in them. They said, *The way of the Lord is not equal* (v. 17:20), suggesting that God was partial in his proceedings, that with him there was respect of persons and that he was more severe against sin and sinners than there was cause.

II. Here is a satisfactory answer given to both these cavils.

1. Those that despaired of finding mercy with God are here answered with a solemn declaration of God's readiness to show mercy, v. 11. When they spoke of *pinning away in their iniquity* God sent the prophet to them, with all speed, to tell them that though their case was sad it was not desperate, but there was yet *hope in Israel*.

(1.) It is certain that God has no delight in the ruin of sinners, nor does he desire it. If they will destroy themselves, he will glorify himself in it, but he has no pleasure in it, but would rather they should *turn and live*, for his goodness is that attribute of his which is most his glory, which is most his delight. He would rather sinners should turn and live than go on and die. He has said it, he has sworn it, that by these two immutable things, in both which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation. We have his word and his oath; and, since he could *swear by no greater, he swears by himself: As I live*. They questioned whether they should *live*, though they did repent and reform; yea, says God, as sure *as I live*, true penitents shall live also; for *their life is hid with Christ in God*.

(2.) It is certain that God is sincere and in earnest in the calls he gives sinners to repent: *Turn you, turn you, from your evil way*. To repent is to turn from our evil way; this God requires sinners to do; this he urges them to do by repeated pressing instances: *Turn you, turn you*. O that they would be prevailed with to turn, to turn quickly, without delay! This he will enable them to do if they will but *frame their doings to turn to the*

Lord, ^{<XIV>}Hosea 5:4. For he has said, *I will pour out my Spirit unto you,*
^{<III>}Proverbs 1:23. And in this he will accept of them; for it is not only what he commands, but what he courts them to.

(3.) It is certain that, if sinners perish in their impenitency, it is owing to themselves; they die because they will die; and herein they act most absurdly and unreasonably: *Why will you die, O house of Israel?* God would have heard them, and they would not be heard.

2. Those that despaired of finding justice with God are here answered with a solemn declaration of the rule of judgment which God would go by in dealing with the children of men, which carries along with it the evidence of its own equity; he that runs may read the justice of it. The Jewish nation, as a nation, was now *dead*; it was ruined to all intents and purposes. The prophet must therefore deal with particular persons, and the rule of judgment concerning them is much like that concerning a nation, ^{<XIII>}Jeremiah 18:8-10. If God speak concerning it to build and to plant, and it do wickedly, he will recall his favours and leave it to ruin. But if he speak concerning it to pluck up and destroy, and it repent, he will revoke the sentence and deliver it. So it is here. In short, The most plausible professors, if they apostatize, shall certainly perish for ever in their apostasy from God; and the most notorious sinners, if they repent, shall certainly be happy for ever in their return to God. This is here repeated again and again, because it ought to be again and again considered, and preached over to our own hearts. This was necessary to be inculcated upon this stupid senseless people, that said, *The way of the Lord is not equal*; for these rules of judgment are so plainly just that they need no other confirmation of them than the repetition of them.

(1.) If those that have made a great profession of religion throw off their profession, quit the good ways of God and grow loose and carnal, sensual and worldly, the profession they made and all the religious performances with which they had for a great while kept up the credit of their profession shall stand them in no stead, but they shall certainly perish in their iniquity, v. 12, 13, 18.

[1.] God says to the *righteous man* that *he shall surely live*, v. 13. He says it by his word, by his ministers. He that lives regularly, his own heart tells him, his neighbours tell him, He shall live. Surely such a man as this cannot but be happy. And it is certain, if he proceed and persevere in his righteousness, and if, in order to that, he be upright and sincere in it, if he

be really as good as he seems to be, he shall live; he shall continue in the love of God and be for ever happy in that love.

[2.] Righteous men, who have very good hopes of themselves and whom others have a very good opinion of, are yet in danger of turning to iniquity by trusting to their righteousness. So the case is put here: *If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity*, and come to make a trade of sin — if he not only take a false step, but turn aside into a false way and persist in it. This may possibly be the case of a righteous man, and it is the effect of his trusting to his own righteousness. Note, Many eminent professors have been ruined by a proud conceitedness of themselves and confidence in themselves. He trust to the merit of his own righteousness, and thinks he has already made God so much his debtor that now he may venture to commit iniquity, for he has righteousness enough in stock to make amends for it; he fancies that whatever evil deeds he may do hereafter he can be in no danger from them, having so many good deeds beforehand to counterbalance them. Or, He trust to the strength of his own righteousness, thinks himself now so well established in a course of virtue that he may thrust himself into any temptation and it cannot overcome him, and so by presuming on his own sufficiency he is brought to commit iniquity. By making bold on the confines of sin he is drawn at length into the depths of hell. This ruined the Pharisees; they *trusted to themselves that they were righteous*, and that their long prayers, and fasting twice in the week, would atone for their devouring widows' houses.

[3.] If righteous men *turn to iniquity*, and return not to their righteousness, they shall certainly perish in their iniquity, and all the righteousness they have formerly done, all their prayers, and all their alms, shall be forgotten. No mention shall be made, no remembrance had, of their good deeds; they shall be overlooked, as if they had never been. The *righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him* from the wrath of God, and the curse of the law, *in the day of his transgression*. When he becomes a traitor and a rebel, and takes up arms against his rightful Sovereign, it will not serve for him to plead in his own defence that formerly he was a loyal subject, and did many good services to the government. No; *he shall not be able to live*. The remembrance of his former righteousness shall be no satisfaction either to God's justice or his own conscience *in the day that he sins*, but rather shall, in the estimate of both, highly aggravate the sin and folly of his apostasy. And therefore *for his iniquity that he committed he shall die*,

v. 13. And again (v. 18), *He shall even die thereby*; and it is owing to himself.

(2.) If those that have lived a wicked life repent and reform, forsake their wicked ways and become religious, their sins shall be pardoned, and they shall be justified and saved, if they persevere in their reformation.

[1.] God says *to the wicked*, “*Thou shalt surely die*. The way that thou art in leads to destruction. The wages of thy sin is death, and thy iniquity will shortly be thy ruin.” It was said to the righteous man, *Thou shalt surely live*, for his encouragement to proceed and persevere in the way of righteousness; but he made an ill use of it, and was emboldened by it to commit iniquity. It was said to the wicked man, *Thou shalt surely die*, for warning to him not to persist in his wicked ways; and he makes a good use of it, and is quickened thereby to return to God and duty. Thus even the threatenings of the word are to some, by the grace of God, a savour of life unto life, while even the promises of the word become to others, by their own corruption, a savour of death unto death. When God says to the wicked man, *Thou shalt surely die*, die eternally, it is to frighten him, not out of his wits, but out of his sins.

[2.] There is many a wicked man who was hastening apace to his own destruction who yet is wrought upon by the grace of God to return and repent, and live a holy life. He *turns from his sin* (v. 14), and is resolved that he will have no more to do with it; and, as an evidence of his repentance for wrong done, he *restores the pledge* (v. 15) which he had taken uncharitably from the poor, *he gives again that which he had robbed* and taken unjustly from the rich. Nor does he only *cease to do evil*, but he *learns to do well*; he *does that which is lawful and right*, and makes conscience of his duty both to God and man — a great change, since, awhile ago, he neither feared God nor regarded man. But many such amazing changes, and blessed ones, have been wrought by the power of divine grace. He that was going on in the paths of death and the destroyer now walks in *the statues of life*, in the way of God's commandments, which has both life in it (¹⁰²⁸Proverbs 12:28) and life at the end of it, ¹⁰²⁷Matthew 19:17. And in this good way he perseveres *without committing iniquity*, though not free from remaining infirmity, yet under the dominion of no iniquity. He repents not of his repentance, nor returns to the commission of those gross sins which he before allowed himself in.

[3.] He that does thus repent and return shall escape the ruin he was running into, and his former sins shall be no prejudice to his acceptance with God. Let him not pine away in his iniquity, for, if he confess and forsake it, he shall find mercy. He *shall surely live; he shall not die*, v. 15. Again (v. 16), *He shall surely live*. Again (v. 19), *He has done that which is lawful and right, and he shall live thereby*. But will not his wickednesses be remembered against him? No; he shall not be punished for them (v. 12): *As for the wickedness of the wicked, though it was very heinous, yet he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness*. Now that it has become his grief it shall not be his ruin. Now that there is a settled separation between him and sin there shall be no longer a separation between him and God. Nay, he shall not be so much as upbraided with them (v. 16): *None of his sins that he has committed shall be mentioned unto him*, either as a clog to his pardon or an allay to the comfort of it, or as any blemish and diminution to the glory that is prepared for him.

Now lay all this together, and then judge whether the *way of the Lord be not equal*, whether this will not justify God in the destruction of sinners and glorify him in the salvation of penitents. The conclusion of the whole matter is (v. 20): *“O you house of Israel, though you are all involved now in the common calamity, yet there shall be a distinction of persons made in the spiritual and eternal state, and I will judge you every one after his ways.”* Though they were sent into captivity by the lump, good fish and bad enclosed in the same net, yet there he will separate between the precious and the vile and will *render to every man according to his works*. Therefore God's way is equal and unexceptionable; but, as for the *children of thy people*, God turns them over to the prophet, as he did to Moses (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 32:7): *“They are thy people; I can scarcely own them for mine.”* As for them, *their way is unequal*; this way which they have got of quarrelling with God and his prophets is absurd and unreasonable. In all disputes between God and his creatures it will certainly be found that he is in the right and they are in the wrong.

~~33:1~~ EZEKIEL 33:21-29

REBUKE TO THE PROUD JEWS

Here we have,

I. The tidings brought to Ezekiel of the burning of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. The city was burnt in the eleventh year of the captivity and the fifth month, ~~33:12~~Jeremiah 52:12, 13. Tidings hereof were brought to the prophet by one that was an eye-witness of the destruction, in the twelfth year, and the tenth month (v. 21), which was a year and almost five months after the thing was done; we may well suppose that, there being a constant correspondence at this time more than ever kept up between Jerusalem and Babylon, he had heard the news long before. But this was the first time he had an account of it from a refugee, from one who escaped, who could be particular, and would be pathetic, in the narrative of it. And the sign given him was the coming of such a one to him as had himself narrowly escaped the flames (~~33:26~~Ezekiel 24:26): *He that escapes in that day shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thy ears, to hear it more distinctly than ever, from one that could say, Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi — These miserable scenes I saw.*

II. The divine impressions and influences he was under, to prepare him for those heavy tidings (v. 22): *The hand of the Lord was upon me before he came, and had opened my mouth to speak to the house of Israel what we had in the former part of this chapter. And now he was no more dumb;* he prophesied now with more freedom and boldness, being by the event proved a true prophet, to the confusion of those that contradicted him. All the prophecies from Ezekiel 24 to this chapter have relation purely to the nations about, it is probable that the prophet, when he received them from the Lord, did not deliver them by word of mouth, but in writing; for he could not *Say to the Ammonites, Say unto Tyrus, Say unto Pharaoh,* etc., so and so, but by letters directed to the persons concerned, as Zacharias, when he could not speak, wrote; and herein he was as truly executing his prophetic office as ever. Note, Even silenced ministers may be doing a great deal of good by writing letters and making visits. But now the prophet's *mouth is opened*, that he may *speak to the children of his people.* It is probable that he had, during these three years, been continually speaking to them as a friend, putting them in mind of what he had

formerly delivered to them, but that he never spoke to them as a prophet, by inspiration, till now, when *the hand of the Lord came upon him*, renewed his commission, gave him fresh instructions, and *opened his mouth*, furnished him with power to speak to the people *as he ought to speak*.

III. The particular message he was entrusted with, relating to these Jews that yet remained in the *land of Israel*, and *inhabited the wastes* of that land, v. 24. See what work sin had made. *The cities of Israel* had now become the wastes of Israel, for they lay all in ruins; some few that had escaped the sword and captivity still continued there and began to think of re-settling. This was so long after the destruction of Jerusalem that it was some time before this that Gedaliah (a modest humble man) and his friends were slain; but probably at this time Johanan, and the *proud men* that joined with him, were at the height (^{24RD}Jeremiah 43:2); and before they came to a resolution to go into Egypt, wherein Jeremiah opposed them, it is probable that the project was to establish themselves in the wastes of the land of Israel, in which Ezekiel here opposed them, and probably despatched the message away by the person that brought him the news of Jerusalem's destruction. Or, perhaps, those here prophesied against might be some other party of Jews, that remained in the land, hoping to take root there and to be sole masters of it, after Johanan and his forces had gone into Egypt. Now here we have,

1. An account of the pride of these remaining Jews, who dwelt in the *wastes of the land of Israel*. Though the providence of God concerning them had been very humbling, and still was very threatening, yet they were intolerably haughty and secure, and promised themselves peace. He that brought the news to the prophet that Jerusalem was smitten could not tell him (it is likely) what these people said, but God tells him, *They say*, “*The land is given us for inheritance*, v. 24. Our partners being gone, it is now all our own by survivorship, or, for want of heirs, it comes to us as occupants; we shall now be placed alone in the midst of the earth and have it all to ourselves.” This argues great stupidity under the weighty hand of God, and a reigning selfishness and narrow-spiritedness; they pleased themselves in the ruin of their country as long as they hoped to find their own account in it, cared not though it were *all waste*, so that they might have the sole property — a poor inheritance to be proud of! They have the impudence to compare their case with Abraham's, glorying in this, *We have Abraham to our father*. “Abraham,” say they, “*was one, one family*,

and *he inherited the land*, and lived many years in the peaceable enjoyment of it; *but we are many*, many families, more numerous than he; *the land is given us for inheritance.*”

(1.) They think they can make out as good a title from God to this land as Abraham could: “If God *gave this land* to him, who was but one worshipper of him, as a reward of his service, much more will he give it to us, who are many worshippers of him, as the reward of our service.” This shows the great conceit they had of the own merits, as if they were greater than those of Abraham their father, who yet was not justified by works.

(2.) They think they can make good the possession of this land against the Chaldeans and all others invaders, as well as Abraham could against those that were competitors with him for it: “If he, who was but one, could hold it, much more shall we, who are many, and have many more at command than his *300 trained servants.*” This shows the confidence they had in their own might; they had got possession, and were resolved to keep it.

2. A check to this pride. Since God's providences did neither humble them nor terrify them, he sends them a message sufficient to do both.

(1.) To humble them, he tells them of the wickedness they still persisted in, which rendered them utterly unworthy to possess this land, so that they could not expect God should give it to them. They had been followed with one judgment after another, but they had not profited by those means of grace as might be expected; they were still unreformed, and how could they expect *that they should possess the land?* “*Shall you possess the land? What! such wicked people as you are? How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land?*” ~~2489~~ Jeremiah 3:19. Surely you never reflect upon yourselves, else you would rather wonder that you are in the land of the living than expect to possess this land. For do you now know how bad you are?”

[1.] “You make no conscience of forbidden fruit, forbidden food: *You eat with the blood,*” directly contrary to one of the precepts given to Noah and his sons when God gave them possession of the earth, ~~0098~~ Genesis 9:4.

[2.] “Idolatry, that covenant-breaking sin, that sin which the jealous God has been in a particular manner provoked by to lay your country waste, is still the sin that most easily besets you and which you have a strong inclination to: *You lift up your eyes towards your idols,* which is a sign

that though perhaps you do not bow your knee to them so much as you have done, yet you set your hearts upon them and hanker after them.”

[3.] “You are as fierce, and cruel, and barbarous as ever: *You shed blood, innocent blood.*”

[4.] “You confide in your own strength, your own arm, your own bow, and have no dependence on, or regard to, God and his providence: *You stand upon your sword* (v. 26); you think to carry all before you, and make all your own, by force of arms.” How can those expect the inheritance of Isaac (as these did) who are of Ishmael's disposition, that had *his hand against every man* (^{<1162>}Genesis 16:12), and Esau's resolution to *live by his sword?* ^{<1074>}Genesis 27:40. We met with those (^{<3627>}Ezekiel 32:27) who, when they died, thought they could not lie easy underground unless they had their swords under their heads. Here we meet with those who, while they live, think they cannot stand firmly above ground unless they have their swords under their feet, as if swords were both the softest pillows and the strongest pillars; though it was sin, it was sin, that first drew the sword. But, blessed be God, there are those who know better, who stand upon the support of the divine power and promise and lay their heads in the bosom of divine love, *not trusting in their own sword,* ^{<3948>}Psalms 44:3.

[5.] “You are guilty of all manner of abominations, and, particularly, *you defile every one his neighbour's wife*, which is an abomination of the first magnitude, *and shall you possess the land?* What! such vile miscreants as you?” Note, Those cannot expect to *possess the land*, nor to enjoy any true comfort or happiness here or hereafter, who live in rebellion against the Lord.

(2.) To terrify them, he tells them of the further judgments God had in store for them, which should make them utterly unable to possess this land, so that they could not stand it out against the enemy. Do they say that they shall possess the land? God has said they shall not, he has sworn it, *As I live, saith the Lord.* Though he has sworn that he delights not *in the death of sinners*, yet he has sworn also that those who persist in impenitency and unbelief *shall not enter into his rest.*

[1.] Those that are in the cities, here called the *wastes*, shall *fall by the sword*, either by the sword of the Chaldeans, who come to avenge the murder of Gedaliah, or by one another's swords, in their intestine broils.

[2.] Those that are in the open field shall be *devoured by wild beasts*, which swarmed, of course, in the country when it was dispeopled, and there were none to master them and keep them under, ^{<0239>}Exodus 23:29. When the army of the enemy had quitted the country still there was no safety in it. *Noisome beasts* constituted one of the four *sore judgments*, ^{<3445>}Ezekiel 14:15.

[3.] Those that are *in the forts and in the caves*, that think themselves safe in artificial or natural fastnesses, because men's eyes cannot discover them nor men's darts reach them, there the arrows of the Almighty shall find them out; they shall *die of the pestilence*.

[4.] The whole land, even the land of Israel, that had been the glory of all lands, shall be *most desolate*, v. 28. *It shall be desolation, desolation*, all over as desolate as desolation itself can make it. The *mountain of Israel*, the fruitful mountains, Zion itself the holy mountain not excepted, *shall be desolate*, the roads unfrequented, the houses uninhabited, that *none shall pass through*; as it was threatened (^{<0587>}Deuteronomy 28:62), *You shall be left few in number*.

[5.] The *pomp of her strength*, whatever she glories in as her pomp and trusts to as her strength, shall be made to cease.

[6.] The cause of all this was very bad; it is for *all their abominations which they have committed*. It is sin that does all this mischief, that makes nations desolate; and therefore we ought to call it an abomination.

[7.] Yet the effect of all this will be very good: *Then shall they know that I am the Lord*, am their Lord, and shall return to their allegiance, *when I have made the land most desolate*. Those are untractable unteachable indeed that are not made to know their dependence upon God when all their creature-comforts fail them and are made desolate.

^{<3580>}EZEKIEL 33:30-33

HYPOCRITICAL PROFESSIONS

The foregoing verses spoke conviction to the Jews who remained in the land of Israel, who were monuments of sparing mercy and yet returned not to the Lord; in these verses those are reproved who were now in captivity

in Babylon, under divine rebukes, and yet were not reformed by them. They are not indeed charged with the same gross enormities that the others are charged with. They made some show of religion and devotion; but their hearts were not right with God. The thing they are here accused of is *mocking the messengers of the lord*, one of their measure-filling sins, which brought this ruin upon them, and yet they were not cured of it. Two ways they mocked the prophet Ezekiel: —

I. By invidious ill natured reflections upon him, privately among themselves, endeavouring by all means possible to render him despicable. The prophet did not know it, but charitably thought that those who spoke so well to him to his face, with so much seeming respect and deference, would surely not speak ill of him behind his back. But God comes and tells him, *The children of thy people are still talking against thee* (v. 30), or *talking of thee*, no good, I doubt. Note, Public persons are a common theme or subject of discourse; every one takes a liberty to censure them at pleasure. Faithful ministers know not how much ill is said of them every day; it is well that they do not; for, if they did, it might prove a discouragement to them in their work not to be easily got over. God takes notice of all that is said against his ministers, not only what is decreed against them, or sworn against them, not only what is written against them, or spoken with solemnity and deliberation, but of what is said against them in common talk, among neighbours when they meet in an evening, *by the walls and in the doors of their houses*, where whatever freedom of speech they use, if they reproach and slander any of God's ministers, God will reckon with them for it; his prophets shall not be made the song of the drunkards always. They had no crime to lay to the prophet's charge, but they loved to talk of him in a careless, scornful, bantering way; they said, jokingly, "*Come, and let us hear what is the word that comes forth from the Lord*"; perhaps it will be something new, and will entertain us, and furnish us with matter for discourse." Note, Those have arrived as a great pitch of profaneness who can make so great a privilege, and so great a duty, as the preaching and hearing of the word of God, a matter of sport and ridicule, yea though it be not done publicly, but in private conversation among themselves. Serious things should be spoken of seriously.

II. By dissembling with him in their attendance upon his ministry. Hypocrites mock God and mock his prophets. But their hypocrisy is open

before God, and the day is coming when, as here, it will be laid open. Observe here,

1. The plausible profession which these people made and the speciousness of their pretensions. They are like those (⁴⁸⁸Matthew 15:8) who *draw nigh to God with their mouths and honour him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him.*

(1.) They were diligent and constant in their attendance upon the means of grace: *They come unto thee as the people come.* In Babylon they had no temple or synagogue, but they went to the prophet's house (³⁸¹Ezekiel 8:1), and there, it is probable, they spent their *new moons and their sabbaths* in religious exercises, (¹⁰²2 Kings 4:23. When the prophet was bound the word of the Lord was not bound; and the people, when they had not the help for their souls that they wished for, were thankful for what they had; it was a reviving in their bondage. Now these hypocrites came, *according to the coming of the people*, as duly and as early as any of the prophet's hearers. Their being said to come *as the people came* seems to intimate that the reason why they came was because other people came; they did not come out of conscience towards God, but only for company, for fashion-sake, and because it was now the custom of their countrymen. Note, Those that have no inward principle of love to God's ordinances may yet be found much in the external observance of them. Cain brought his sacrifice as well as Abel; and the Pharisee went up to the temple to pray as well as the publican.

(2.) They behaved themselves very decently and reverently in the public assembly; there were none of them whispering, or laughing, or gazing about them, or sleeping. But *they sit before thee as my people*, with all the shows of gravity, and sereneness, and composure of mind. They sit out the time, without weariness, or wishing the sermon done.

(3.) They were very attentive to the word preached: "They are not thinking of something else, but they *hear thy words*, and take notice of what thou sayest."

(4.) They pretended to have a great kindness and respect for the prophet. Though, behind his back, they could not give him a good word, yet, to his face, *they showed much love* to him and his doctrine; they pretended to have a great concern lest he should spend himself too much in preaching

or expose himself to the Chaldeans, for they would be thought to be some of his best friends and well-wishers.

(5.) They took a great deal of pleasure in the word; they *delighted to know God's word*, ^{<280>}Isaiah 58:2. *Herod heard John Baptist gladly*, ^{<465>}Mark 6:20. *Thou art unto them as a very lovely song*. Ezekiel's matter was surprising, his language fine, his expressions elegant, his similitudes apt, his voice melodious, and his delivery graceful; so that they could sit with as much pleasure to hear him preach as (if I may speak in the language of our times) to see a play or an opera, or to hear a concert of music. Ezekiel was to them as one *that had a pleasant voice* and could sing well, *or play well on an instrument*. Note, Men may have their fancies pleased by the word, and yet not have their consciences touched nor their hearts changed, the itching ear gratified and yet not the corrupt nature sanctified.

2. The hypocrisy of these professions and pretensions; it is all a sham, it is all a jest.

(1.) They have no cordial affection for the word of God. While they *show much love* it is only *with the mouth*, from the teeth outward, but *their heart goes after their covetousness*; they are as much set upon the world as ever, as much in love and league with it as ever. Hearing the word is only their diversion and recreation, a pretty amusement now and then for an hour or two. But still their main business is with their farm and merchandise; the bent and bias of their souls are towards them, and their *inward thoughts* are employed in projects about them. Note, Covetousness is the ruining sin of multitudes that make a great profession of religion; it is the love of the world that secretly eats the love of God out of their hearts. *The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are the thorns that choke the seed*, and choke the soul too. And those neither please God nor profit themselves who, when they are hearing the word of God, are musing upon their worldly affairs. God has his eye on the hearts that do so.

(2.) They yield no subjection to it. They *hear thy words*, but it is only a hearing that they *give thee*, for they *will not do them*, v. 31. And again (v. 32), they *do them not*. They will not be persuaded by all the prophet can say, either by authority or argument, to cross themselves in any instance, to part with any one beloved sin, or apply themselves to any one duty that is against the grain to flesh and blood. Note, There are many who take pleasure in hearing the word, but make no conscience of doing it; and so they build upon the sand, and deceive themselves.

3. Let us see what will be in the end hereof: *Shall their unbelief and carelessness make the word of God of no effect?* By no means.

(1.) God will confirm the prophet's word, though they contemn it, and make light of it, v. 33. What he says will come to pass, and not one jot or one tittle shall fall to the ground. Note, The curses of the law, though they may be bantered by profane wits, cannot be baffled.

(2.) They themselves shall rue their folly when it is too late. When it comes to pass *they shall know*, shall know to their cost, know to their confusion, that *a prophet has been among them*, though they made no more of him than as one that *had a pleasant voice*. Note, Those who will not consider that a prophet is among them, and who improve not the day of their visitation while it is continued, will be made to remember that a prophet has been among them when the things that belong to their peace are *hidden from their eyes*. The day is coming when vain and worldly men will have other thoughts of things than now they have, and will feel a weight in that which they made light of. They shall know that *a prophet has been among them* when they see the event exactly answer the prediction, and the prophet himself shall be a witness against them that they had fair warning given them, but would not take it. When Ezekiel is gone, whom now they speak against, and *there is no more any prophet*, nor any *to show them how long*, then they will remember that once they had a prophet, but knew not how to use him well. Note, Those who will not know the worth of mercies by the improvement of them will justly be made to know the worth of them by the want of them, as those who should desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, which now they slighted, and might not see it.