

# CHAPTER 3

In this chapter we have the further preparation of the prophet for the work to which God called him.

- I.** His eating the roll that was presented to him in the close of the foregoing chapter (v. 1-3).
- II.** Further instructions and encouragements given him to the same purport with those in the foregoing chapter (v. 4-11).
- III.** The mighty impulse he was under, with which he was carried to those that were to be his hearers (v. 12-15).
- IV.** A further explication of his office and business as a prophet, under the similitude of a watchman (v. 16-21).
- V.** The restraining and restoring of the prophet's liberty of speech, as God pleased (v. 22-27).

## ~~361~~ EZEKIEL 3:1-15

### THE PROPHET ORDERED TO EAT THE ROLL

These verses are fitly joined by some translators to the foregoing chapter, as being of a piece with it and a continuation of the same vision. The prophets received the word from God that they might deliver it to the people of God, furnished themselves that they might furnish them with the knowledge of the mind and will of God. Now here the prophet is taught,

**I.** How he must receive divine revelation himself, v. 1. Christ (whom he saw upon the throne, ~~361~~ Ezekiel 1:26) said to him, “*Son of man, eat this roll, admit this revelation into thy understanding, take it, take the meaning of it, understand it aright, admit it into thy heart, apply it, and be affected with it; imprint it in thy mind, ruminare and chew the cud upon it; take it as it is entire, and make no difficulty of it, nay, take a pleasure in it as thou dost in thy meat, and let thy soul be nourished and strengthened by it; let it be meat and drink to thee, and as thy necessary food; be full of it, as thou art of the meat thou hast eaten.*” Thus ministers should in their studies and meditations take in that word of God which they are to preach to others.

*Thy words were found, and I did eat them,* <sup><24516></sup> Jeremiah 15:16. They must be both well acquainted and much affected with the things of God, that they may speak of them both clearly and warmly, with a great deal of divine light and heat. Now observe,

**1.** How this command is inculcated upon the prophet. In the foregoing chapter, *Eat what I give thee*; and here (v. 1), “*Eat that thou findest*, that which is presented to thee by the hand of Christ.” Note, Whatever we find to be the word of God, whatever is brought to us by him who is the Word of God, we must receive it without disputing. What we find set before us in the scripture, that we must eat. And again (v. 3), “*Cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll*; do not eat it and bring it up again, as that which is nauseous, but eat it and retain it, as that which is nourishing and grateful to the stomach. Feast upon this vision till thou be *full of matter*, as Elihu was, <sup><3828></sup> Job 32:18. Let the word have a place in thee, the innermost place.” We must take pains with our own hearts, that we may cause them duly to receive and entertain the word of God, that every faculty may do its office, in order to the due digesting of the word of God, that it may be turned *in succum et sanguinem — into blood and spirits*. We must empty ourselves of worldly things, that we may *fill our bowels with this roll*.

**2.** How this command is explained (v. 10): “*All my words that I shall speak unto thee*, to be spoken unto the people, *thou must receive in thy heart*, as well as *hear with thy ears*, receive them in the love of them.” *Let these sayings sink down into your ears*, <sup><4044></sup> Luke 9:44. Christ demands the prophet's attention not only to what he now says, but to all that he shall at any time hereafter speak: *Receive it all in thy heart; meditate on these things and give thyself wholly to them*, <sup><5015></sup> 1 Timothy 4:15.

**3.** How this command was obeyed in vision. He *opened his mouth* and Christ *caused him to eat the roll*, v. 2. If we be truly willing to receive the word into our hearts, Christ will by his Spirit bring it into them and cause it to *dwell in us richly*. If he that *opens the roll*, and by his Spirit, as a *Spirit of revelation*, spreads it before us, did not also *open our understanding*, and by his Spirit, as a *Spirit of wisdom*, give us the knowledge of it and *cause us to eat* it, we should be for ever strangers to it. The prophet had reason to fear that the roll would be an unpleasant morsel and a sorry dish to make a meal of, but it proved to be in his *mouth as honey for sweetness*. Note, if we readily obey even the most difficult

commands, we shall find that comfort in the reflection which will make us abundant amends for all the hardships we meet with in the way of our duty. Though *the roll was filled with lamentations, and mourning, and woe*, yet it was to the prophet *as honey for sweetness*. Note, Gracious souls can receive those truths of God with great delight which speak most terror to wicked people. We find St. John let into some part of the revelation by such a sign as this, <sup><400></sup>Revelation 10:9, 10. He *took the book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up, and it was, as this, in his mouth sweet as honey; but it was bitter in the belly; and we shall find that this was so too, for (v. 14) the prophet went in bitterness.*

**II.** How he must deliver that divine revelation to others which he himself had received (v. 1): *Eat this roll, and then go, speak to the house of Israel*. He must not undertake to preach the things of God to others till he did himself fully understand them; let him not go without his errand, nor take it by the halves. But when he does himself fully understand them he must be both busy and bold to preach them for the good of others. We must not *conceal the words of the Holy One* (<sup><400></sup>Job 6:10), for that is burying a talent which was given us to trade with. He must *go and speak to the house of Israel*; for it is their privilege to have God's statutes and judgments made known to them; as *the giving of the law* (the lively oracles), so prophecy (the living oracles) *pertains to them*. He is not sent to the Chaldeans to reprove them for their sins, but *to the house of Israel* to reprove them for theirs; for the father corrects his own child if he do amiss, not the child of a stranger.

**1.** The instructions given him in speaking to them are much the same with those in the foregoing chapter.

**(1.)** He must speak to them all that, and that only, which God spoke to him. he had said before (<sup><400></sup>Ezekiel 2:7): *Thou shalt speak my words to them*; here he says (v. 4), *Thou shalt speak with my words unto them, or in my words*. He must not only say that which for substance is the same that God had said to him, but as near as may be in the same language and expressions. Blessed Paul, though a man of a very happy invention, yet speaks of the things of God *in the words which the Holy Ghost teaches*, <sup><400></sup>1 Corinthians 2:13. Scripture truths look best in scripture language, their native dress; and how can we better speak God's mind than with his words?

(2.) He must remember that they are *the house of Israel* whom he is sent to speak to, God's house and his own; and therefore such as he ought to have a particular concern for and to deal faithfully and tenderly with. They were such as he had an intimate acquaintance with, being not only their countryman, but their *companion in tribulation*; they and he were fellow-sufferers, and had lately been fellow-travellers, in very melancholy circumstances, from Judea to Babylon, and had often mingled their tears, which could not but knit their affections to each other. It was well for the people that they had a prophet who knew experimentally how to sympathize with them, and could not but be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. It was well for the prophet that he had to do with those of his own nation, not *with a people of strange speech and a hard language*, deep of lip, so that thou canst not fathom their meaning, and heavy of tongue, whom it is intolerable and impossible to converse with. Every strange language seems to us to be deep and heavy. "Thou art not sent to *many such people*, whom thou couldst neither speak to nor hear from, neither understand nor be understood among but by an interpreter." The apostles indeed were sent to *many people of a strange speech*, but they could not have done any good among them if they had not had *the gift of tongues*; but Ezekiel was sent only to one people, those but a few, and his own, whom having acquaintance with he might hope to find acceptance with.

(3.) He must remember what God had already told him of the bad character of those to whom he was sent, that, if he met with discouragement and disappointment in them, he might not be offended. They are *impudent and hard-hearted* (v. 7), no convictions of sin would make them blush, no denunciations of wrath would make them tremble. Two things aggravated their obstinacy: —

[1.] That they were more obstinate than their neighbours would have been if the prophet had been sent to them. had God sent him to any other people, though of a *strange speech*, surely they would have hearkened to him; they would at least have given him a patient hearing and shown him that respect which he could not obtain of his own countrymen. The Ninevites were wrought upon by Jonah's preaching when the house of Israel, that was compassed about with so great a cloud of prophets, was unhumbled and unreformed. But what shall we say to these things? The means of grace are given to those that will not improve them and withheld

from those that would have improved them. We must resolve this into the divine sovereignty, and say, Lord, *thy judgments are a great deep*.

[2.] That they were obstinate against God himself: “They will not hearken unto thee, and no marvel, for they will not hearken unto me;” they will not regard the word of the prophet, for they will not regard the rod of God, by which the *Lord's voice cries in the city*. If they believe not God speaking to them by a minister, neither would they believe though he should speak to them by *a voice from heaven*; nay, therefore they reject what the prophet says, because it comes from God, whom *the carnal mind is enmity* to. They are prejudiced against the law of God, and for that reason turn a deaf ear to his prophets, whose business it is to enforce his law.

(4.) He must resolve to put on courage, and Christ promises to steel him with it, v. 8, 9. He is sent to such as *are impudent and hard-hearted*, who will receive no impressions nor be wrought upon either by fair means or foul, who will take a pride in affronting God's messenger and confronting the message. It will be a hard task to know how to deal with them; but,

[1.] God will enable him to put a good face on it: “*I have made thy face strong against their faces*, endued thee with all the firmness and boldness that the case calls for.” Perhaps Ezekiel was naturally bashful and timorous, but, if God did not find him fit, yet by his grace he made him fit, to encounter the greatest difficulties. Note, The more impudent wicked people are in their opposition to religion the more openly and resolutely should God's people appear in the practice and defence of it. let the *innocent stir up himself against the hypocrite*, <sup><87B></sup>Job 17:8. When vice is daring let not virtue be sneaking. And, when God has work to do, he will animate men for it and give them strength according to the day. If there be occasion, God can and will by his grace make the *foreheads* of faithful ministers *as an adamant*, so that the most threatening powers shall not dash them out of countenance. *The Lord God will help men, therefore have I set my face like a flint*, <sup><80B></sup>Isaiah 50:7.

[2.] He is therefore commanded to have a good heart on it, and to go on in his work with a holy security, not valuing either the censures or the threats of his enemies: “*Fear not, neither be dismayed at their looks*; let not the menaces of their impotent malice cast either a damp upon thee or a stumbling-block before thee.” Bold sinners must have bold reprovers; *evil beasts* must be *rebuked* cuttingly (<sup><31D></sup>Titus 1:12, 13), must be *saved with fear*, <sup><61D></sup>Jude 1:23. Those that keep closely to the service of God may be

sure of the favour of God, and then they need not be dismayed at the proud looks of men. Let not the angry countenance that drives away a back-biting tongue give any check to a reproving tongue.

**(5.)** He must continue instant with them in his preaching, whatever the success was, v. 11. he must *go to those of the captivity*, who, being in affliction, it was to be hoped would receive instruction; he must look upon them as *the children of his people*, to whom he was nearly allied, and for whom he therefore ought to have a very tender concern, as Paul for his kinsmen, <sup>ROM</sup>Romans 9:3. And he must *tell them* not only what the Lord said, but that the Lord said it; let him speak in God's name, and back what he said with his authority: *Thus saith the Lord God; tell them so, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear*. Not that it may be indifferent to us what success our ministry has, but, whatever it be, we must go on with our work and leave the issue to God. We must not say "Here are some so good that we do not need to speak to them," or, "Here are others so bad that it is to no purpose to speak to them;" but, however it be, deliver thy message faithfully, *tell them, The Lord God saith so and so*, let them reject it at their peril.

**2.** Full instructions being thus given to the prophet, pursuant to his commission, we are here told,

**(1.)** With what satisfaction this mission of his was applauded by the holy angels, who were very well pleased to see one of a nature inferior to their own thus honourable employed and entrusted. He *heard a voice of a great rushing* (v. 12), as if the angels thronged and crowded to see the inauguration of a prophet; for to them *is known by the church* (that is, by reflection from the church) *the manifold wisdom of God*, <sup>EPH</sup>Ephesians 3:10. They seemed to strive who should get nearest to this great sight. he *heard the noise of their wings that touched*, or (as the word is) *kissed one another*, denoting the mutual affections and assistances of the angels. He heard also *the noise of the wheels* of Providence moving *over-against* the angels and in concert with them. All this was to engage his attention and to convince him that the God who sent him, having such a glorious train of attendants, no doubt had power sufficient to bear him out in his work. But all this noise ended in the voice of praise. He heard them saying, *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place*.

**[1.]** From heaven, his place above, whence his glory was now in vision descending, or whither perhaps it was now returning. Let the innumerable

company of angels above join with those employed in this vision in saying, *Blessed be the glory of the Lord. Praise you the Lord from the heavens. Praise him, all his angels,* <sup><216></sup>Psalm 148:1, 2.

[2.] From the temple, his place on earth, whence his glory was now departing. They lament the departure of the glory, but adore the righteousness of God in it: however it be, yet God is blessed and glorious, and ever will be so. The prophet Isaiah heard God thus praised when he received his commission (<sup><216></sup>Isaiah 6:3); and a comfort it is to all the faithful servants of God, when they see how much God is dishonoured in this lower world, to think how much he is admired and glorified in the upper world. *The glory of the Lord* has many slights from our place, but many *praises from his place*.

(2.) With what reluctance of his own spirit, and yet with what a mighty efficacy of *the Spirit of God*, the prophet was himself brought to the execution of his office. *The grace given to him was not in vain*; for,

[1.] The Spirit led him with a strong hand. God bade him go, but he stirred not till *the Spirit took him up*. *The Spirit of the living creatures* that was in *the wheels* now was in the prophet too, and *took him up*, first to hear more distinctly the acclamations of the angels (v. 12), but afterwards (v. 14) *lifted him up, and took him away* to his work, which he was backward to, being very loth either to bring trouble upon himself or foretel it to his people. he would gladly have been excused, but must own, as another prophet does (<sup><216></sup>Jeremiah 20:7), *Thou was stronger than I, and hast prevailed*. Ezekiel would willingly have kept all he heard and saw to himself, that it might go no further, *but the hand of the Lord was strong upon him* and overpowered him; he was carried on contrary to his own inclinations by the prophetic impulse, so that he could not *but speak the things which he had heard and seen*, as the apostles, <sup><400></sup>Acts 4:20. Note, Those whom God calls to the ministry, as he furnishes their heads for it, so he bows their hearts to it.

[2.] He followed with a sad heart: *The Spirit took me away*, says he, *and then I went*, but it was *in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit*. He had perhaps seen what a hard task Jeremiah had at Jerusalem when he appeared as a prophet, what pains he took, what opposition he met with, how he was abused by hand and tongue, and what ill treatment he met with, and all to no purpose. “And” (thinks Ezekiel) “must I be set up for a mark like him?” The life of a captive was bad enough; but what would the

life of a prophet in captivity be? Therefore he went in this fret and under this discomposure. Note, There may in some cases be a great reluctance of corruption even where there is a manifest predominance of grace. “*I went, not disobedient to the heavenly vision, or shrinking from the work, as Jonah, but I went in bitterness, not at all pleased with it.*” When he received the divine revelation himself, it was to him *sweet as honey* (v. 3); he could with abundance of pleasure have spent all his days in meditating upon it; but when he is to preach it to others, who, he foresees, will be hardened and exasperated by it, and have their condemnation aggravated, then he goes *in bitterness*. Note, It is a great grief to faithful ministers, and makes them go on in their work with a heavy heart, when they find people untractable and hating to be reformed. he *went in the heat of his spirit*, because of the discouragements he foresaw he should meet with; *but the hand of the Lord was strong upon him*, not only to compel him to his work, but to fit him for it, to carry him through it, and animate him against the difficulties he would meet with (so we may understand it); and, when he found it so, he was better reconciled to his business and applied himself to it: *Then he came to those of the captivity* (v. 15), to some place where there were many of them together, *and sat where they sat*, working, or reading, or talking, and continued *among them seven days* to hear what they said and observe what they did; and all that time he was waiting for *the word of the Lord* to come to him. Note, Those that would speak suitably and profitably to people about their souls must acquaint themselves with them and with their case, must do as Ezekiel did here, must *sit where they sit*, and speak familiarly to them of the things of God, and put themselves into their condition, yea, though they *sit by the rivers of Babylon*. But observe, He was *there astonished*, overwhelmed with grief for the sins and miseries of his people and overpowered by the pomp of the vision he had seen. he was *there desolate* (so some read it); God showed him no visions, men made him no visit. Thus was he left to digest his grief, and come to a better temper, before *the word of the Lord* should come to him. Note, Those whom god designs to exalt and enlarge he first humbles and straitens for a time.



## ~~3186~~ EZEKIEL 3:16-21

### THE WATCHMAN'S OFFICE

These further instructions God gave to the prophet *at the end of seven days*, that is, on the seventh day after the vision he had; and it is very probably that both that and this were on the sabbath day, which *the house of Israel*, even in their captivity, observed as well as they could in those circumstances. We do not find that their conquerors and oppressors tied them to any constant service, as their Egyptian task-masters had formerly done, but that they might observe the sabbath-rest for a sign to distinguish between them and their neighbours; but for the sabbath-work they had not the convenience of temple or synagogue, only it should seem they had a *place by the river side where prayer was wont to be made* (as ~~4443~~ Acts 16:13); there they met on the sabbath day; there their enemies upbraided them with *the songs of Zion* (~~3101~~ Psalm 137:1, 3); there Ezekiel met them, and *the word of the Lord* then and there *came to him*. He that had been musing and meditating on the things of God all the week was fit to speak to the people in God's name on the sabbath day, and disposed to hear God speak to him. This sabbath day Ezekiel was not so honoured with visions of the glory of God as he had been the sabbath before; but he is plainly, and by a very common similitude, told his duty, which he is to communicate to the people. Note, Raptures and transports of joy are not the daily bread of God's children, however they may upon special occasions be feasted with them. We must not deny but that we have truly communion with God (~~3118~~ 1 John 1:3) though we have it not always so sensibly as at some times. And, though the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven may sometimes be looked into, yet ordinarily it is plain preaching that is most for edification. God here tells the prophet what his office was, and what the duty of that office; and this (we may suppose) he was to tell the people, that they might attend to what he said and improve it accordingly. Note, It is good for people to know and consider what a charge their ministers have of them and what an account they must shortly give of that charge. Observe,

**I.** What the office is to which the prophet is called: *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel*, v. 17. The vision he saw astonished him: he knew not what to make of that, and therefore God used this plain comparison, which served better to lead him to the

understanding of his work and so to reconcile him to it. he sat among the captives, and said little, but God comes to him, and tells him that will not do; he is *a watchman*, and has something to say to them; he is appointed to be as *a watchman* in the city, to guard against fire, robbers, and disturbers of the peace, as *a watchman* over the flock, to guard against thieves and beasts of prey, but especially as *a watchman* in the camp, in an invaded country or a besieged town, that is to watch the motions of the enemy, and to sound an alarm upon the approach, nay, upon the first appearance, of danger. This supposes *the house of Israel* to be in a military state, and exposed to enemies, who are subtle and restless in their attempts upon it; yea, and each of the particular members of that house to be in danger and concerned to stand upon their guard. Note, Ministers are *watchmen on the church's walls* (<sup>2216</sup>Isaiah 62:6), *watchmen that go about the city*, <sup>2218</sup>Song of Solomon 3:3. It is a toilsome office. Watchmen must keep awake, be they ever so sleepy, and keep abroad, be it ever so cold; they must stand all weathers *upon the watch-tower*, <sup>2218</sup>Isaiah 21:8; <sup>1340</sup>Genesis 31:40. It is a dangerous office. Sometimes they cannot keep their post, but are in peril of death from the enemy, who gain their point if they kill the sentinel; and yet they dare not quit their post upon pain of death from their general. Such a dilemma are the church's watchmen in; men will curse them if they be faithful, and God will curse them if they be false. But it is a needful office; *the house of Israel* cannot be safe without watchmen, and yet, *except the Lord keep it, the watchman waketh but in vain*, <sup>801</sup>Psalms 127:1, 2.

**II.** What is the duty of this office. The work of a watchman is to take notice and to give notice.

**1.** The prophet, as a watchman, must take notice of what God said concerning this people, not only concerning the body of the people, to which the prophecies of Jeremiah and other prophets had most commonly reference, but concerning particular persons, according as their character was. He must not, as other watchmen, look round to spy danger and gain intelligence, but he must look up to God, and further he need not look: *Hear the word at my mouth*, v. 17. Note, Those that are to preach must first hear; for how can those teach others who have not first learned themselves?

**2.** He must give notice of what he heard. As a watchman must have eyes in his head, so he must have a tongue in his head; if he be dumb, it is as bad

as if he were blind, <sup><280></sup>Isaiah 56:10. Thou shalt *give them warning from me*, sound an alarm in the *holy mountain*; not in his own name, or as from himself, but in God's name, and from him. Ministers are God's mouth to the children of men. The scriptures are written for our admonition. *By them is thy servant warned*, <sup><301></sup>Psalms 19:11. But, because that which is delivered *vivf voce* — *by the living voice*, commonly makes the deepest impression, God is pleased, by men like ourselves, who are equally concerned, to enforce upon us the warnings of the written word. Now the prophet, in his preaching, must distinguish between the wicked and the righteous, the precious and the vile, and in his applications must suit his alarms to each, giving every one his portion; and, if he did this, he should have the comfort of it, whatever the success was, but, if not, he was accountable.

**(1.)** Some of those he had to do with were wicked, and he must warn them not to go on in their wickedness, but to turn from it, v. 18, 19. We may observe here,

**[1.]** That the God of heaven has said, and does say, to every wicked man, that if he go on still in his trespasses he *shall surely die*. *His iniquity* shall undoubtedly be his ruin; it tends to ruin and will end in ruin. Dying *thou shalt die*, *thou shalt die* so great a death, *shalt die* eternally, be ever dying, but never dead. *The wicked man shall die in his iniquity*, *shall fie* under the guilt of it, *die* under the dominion of it.

**[2.]** That if a *wicked man turn from his wickedness*, and *from his wicked way*, *he shall live*, and the ruin he is threatened with shall be prevented; and, that he may do so, he is warned of the danger he is in. *The wicked man shall die* if he go on, but *shall live* if he repent. Observe, he is to turn *from his wickedness* and *from his wicked way*. It is not enough for a man to turn *from his wicked way* by an outward reformation, which may be the effect of his sins leaving him rather than of his leaving his sins, but he must *turn from his wickedness*, from the love of it and the inclination to it, by an inward regeneration; if he do not so much as turn *from his wicked way*, there is little hope that he will turn *from his wickedness*.

**[3.]** That it is the duty of ministers both to warn sinners of the danger of sin and to assure them of the benefit of repentance, to set before them how miserable they are if they go on in sin, and how happy they may be if they will but repent and reform. Note, The ministry of the word is concerning matters of *life and death*, for those are the things it sets before us, *the*

*blessing and the curse*, that we may escape the curse and inherit the blessing.

[4.] That, though ministers do not warn wicked people as they ought of their misery and danger, yet that shall not be admitted as an excuse for those that go on still in their trespasses; for, though the watchman did not *give them warning*, yet they *shall die in their iniquity*, for they had sufficient warning given them by the providence of God and their own consciences; and, if they would have taken it, they might have *saved their lives*.

[5.] That if ministers be not faithful to their trust, if they do not warn sinners of the fatal consequences of sin, but suffer them to go on unreprieved, the *blood* of those that perish through their carelessness *will be required at their hand*. It shall be charged upon them in the day of account that it was owing to their unfaithfulness that such and such precious souls perished in sin; for who knows but if they had had fair warning given them they might have fled in time *from the wrath to come*? And, if it contract so heinous a guilt as it does to be accessory to the murder of a dying body, what is it to be accessory to the ruin of an immortal soul?

[6.] That if ministers do their duty in giving warning to sinners, though the warning be not taken, yet they may have this satisfaction, that they are *clear from their blood*, and have *delivered their own souls*, though they cannot prevail to deliver theirs. Those that are faithful shall have their reward, though they be not successful.

(2.) Some of those he had to deal with were *righteous*, at least he had reason to think, in a judgment of charity, that they were so; and he must warn them not to apostatize and *turn away from their righteousness*, v. 20, 21. We may observe here,

[1.] That the best men in the world have need to be warned against apostasy, and to be told of the danger they are in of it and the danger they are in by it. God's servants must be warned (<sup><3951></sup>Psalm 19:11) that they do not neglect his work and quit his service. One good means to keep us from falling is to keep up a holy fear of falling, <sup><3951></sup>Hebrews 4:1. *Let us therefore fear*; and (<sup><3951></sup>Romans 11:20) even those that *stand by faith* must not be *high-minded, but fear*, and must therefore be warned.

[2.] There is a *righteousness* which a man may *turn from*, a seeming *righteousness*, and, if men turn from this, it thereby appears that it was never sincere, how passable, nay, how plausible soever it was; for, *if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us*, <sup>GRB</sup>1 John 2:19. There are many that *begin in the spirit*, but *end in the flesh*, that set their faces heavenward, but look back; that had a first love, but have lost it, and *turned from the holy commandment*.

[3.] When men *turn from their righteousness* they soon learn to commit iniquity. When they grow careless and remiss in the duties of God's worship, neglect them, or are negligent in them, they become an easy prey to the tempter. Omissions make way for commissions.

[4.] *When men turn from their righteousness, and commit iniquity*, it is just with God to lay *stumbling-blocks before them*, that they may grow worse and worse, till they are ripened for destruction. When Pharaoh hardened his heart God hardened it. When sinners turn their back upon God, desert his service, and so cast a reproach upon it, he does, in a way of righteous judgment, not only withdraw his restraining grace and give them up to their own hearts' lusts, but order them by his providence into such circumstances as occasion their sin and hasten their ruin. There are those to whom Christ himself is *a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence*, <sup>GRB</sup>1 Peter 2:8.

[5.] The righteousness which men relinquish shall never be remembered to their honour or comfort; it will stand them in no stead in this world or the other. Apostates lose all that they have wrought; their services and sufferings are all in vain, and shall never be brought to an account, because not continued in. It is a rule in the law, *Factum non dicitur, quod non perseverat* — *We are said to do only that which we do perseveringly*, <sup>GRB</sup>Galatians 3:3, 4.

[6.] If ministers do not give fair warning, as they ought, of the weakness of the best, their aptness to stumble and fall, the particular temptations they are in and the fatal consequences of apostasy, the ruin of those that do apostatize will be laid at their door, and they shall answer for it. Not but that there are those who are warned against it, and yet *turn from their righteousness*; but that case is not put here, as was concerning the wicked man, but, on the contrary, that a *righteous man*, being warned, takes the warning and *does not sin* (v. 21); for, if you *give instruction to a wise man, he will be yet wiser*. We must not only not flatter the wicked, but not

flatter even the righteous as if they were perfectly safe any where on this side heaven.

[7.] If ministers give warning, and people take it, it is well for both. Nothing is more beautiful than *a wise reprovcr upon an obedient ear*; the one *shall live because he is warned* and the other *has delivered his soul*. What can a good minister desire more than to *save himself and those that hear him*? <sup>3416</sup>1 Timothy 4:16.

## ~~3022~~ EZEKIEL 3:22-27

### THE PEOPLE'S CONTUMACY PREDICTED

After all this large and magnificent discovery which God had made of himself to the prophet, and the full instructions he had given him how to deal with those to whom he sent him with an ample commission, we should have expected presently to see him preaching the word of God to a great congregation of Israel; but here we find it quite otherwise. his work here, at first, seems not at all proportionable to the pomp of his call.

**I.** We have him here retired for further learning. By his unwillingness to go it should seem as if he were not so thoroughly convinced as he might have been of the ability of him that sent him to bear him out; and therefore, to encourage him against the difficulties he foresaw, God will favour him with another vision of his glory, which (if any thing) would put life into him and animate him for his work. In order for this, God calls him out *to the plain* (v. 22) and there he will have some *talk with him*. See and admire the condescension of God in conversing thus familiarly with a man, a *son of man*, a poor captive, nay, with a sinful man, who, when God sent him *went in bitterness of spirit*, and was at this time out of humour with his work. And let us own ourselves for ever indebted to the mediation of Christ for this blessed intercourse and communion between God and man, between heaven and earth. See here the benefit of solitude, and how much it befriends contemplation. It is very comfortable to be alone with God, withdrawn from the world for converse with him, to hear from him, to speak to him; and a good man will say that he is never less alone than when thus alone. Ezekiel *went forth into the plain* more willingly than he went *among those of the captivity* (v. 15); for those that know what it is to have communion with God cannot but prefer that before any converse

with this world, especially such as is commonly met with. He *went out into the plain*, and there he saw the same vision that he had seen *by the river of Chebar*; for God is not tied to places. Note, Those who follow God shall meet with his consolations, wherever they go. God called him out to *talk with him*, but did more than that: he showed him his *glory*, v. 23. We are not now to expect such visions, but we must own that we have a favour done us no way inferior if we so by faith *behold the glory of the Lord* as to be *changed into the same image, by the Spirit of the Lord*; and this *honour have all his saints. Praise you the Lord*, <sup>4088</sup>2 Corinthians 3:18.

**II.** We have him here restrained from further teaching for the present. When he saw *the glory of the Lord* he *fell on his face*, being struck with an awe of God's majesty and a dread of his displeasure; but *the Spirit entered into him* to raise him up, and then he recovered himself and got *upon his feet* and heard what the Spirit whispered to him, which is very surprising. One would have expected now that God would send him directly to the chief place of concourse, would give him favour in the eyes of his brethren, and make him and his message acceptable to them, that he would have a wider door of opportunity opened to him and that God would give him a door of utterance to open his mouth boldly; but what is here said to him is the reverse of all this.

**1.** Instead of sending him to a public assembly, he orders him to confine himself to his own lodgings: *Go, shut thyself within thy house*, v. 24. He was not willing to appear in public, and, when he did, the people did not regard him, nor show him the respect he deserved, and as a just rebuke both to him and them, to him for his shyness of them and to them for their coldness towards him, God forbids him to appear in public. Note, Our choice is often made our punishment; and it is a righteous thing with God to remove teachers into corners when they, or their people, or both, grow indifferent to solemn assemblies. Ezekiel must shut up himself, some think, to give a sign of the besieging of Jerusalem, in which the people should be closely shut up as he was in his house, and which he speaks of in the next chapter. He must *shut himself within his house*, that he might receive further discoveries of the mind of God and might abundantly furnish himself with something to say to the people when he went abroad. We find that *the elders of Judah* visited him and *sat before him* sometimes *in his house* (<sup>3881</sup>Ezekiel 8:1), to be witnesses of his ecstasies; but it was not till <sup>38125</sup>Ezekiel 11:25 that he *spoke to those of the captivity all the things that the Lord had shown him*. Note, Those that are called to preach

must find time to study, and a great deal of time too, must often shut themselves up in their houses, that they may give attendance to reading and meditation, and so their profiting may appear to all.

**2.** Instead of securing him an interest in the esteem and affections of those to whom he sent him he tells him that *they shall put bands upon him and bind him* (v. 25), either

**(1.)** As a criminal. *They shall bind him* in order to the further punishing of him as a disturber of the peace; though they were themselves sent into bondage in Babylon for persecuting the prophets, yet there they continue to persecute them. Or, rather,

**(2.)** As a distracted man. *They would go about to bind him* as one beside himself; for to that they imputed his violent motions in his raptures. The captains asked Jehu, *Wherefore came this mad fellow unto thee?* Festus said to Paul, *Thou art beside thyself*; and so the Jews said of our Lord Jesus, <sup><BIB></sup>Mark 3:21. Perhaps this was the reason why he must keep within doors, because otherwise they would bind him, under pretence of his being mad, and therefore he must not *go out among them*. Justly are prophets forbidden to go to those that will abuse them.

**3.** Instead of opening his lips that his mouth might show forth God's praise, God silence him, made his *tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth*, so that he was dumb for a considerable time, v. 26. The pious captives in Babylon used this imprecation upon themselves, that, *if they should forget Jerusalem, there tongue might cleave to the roof of their mouth*, <sup><BIB></sup>Psalms 137:6. Ezekiel remembers Jerusalem more than any of them, and yet his *tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth*, and he that can speak best is forbidden to speak at all; and the reason given is because *they are a rebellious house* to whom he is sent, and they are not worthy to have him for a *reprover*. He shall not give them instructions and admonitions, for they are lost and thrown away upon them. he is before commanded to speak boldly to them because *they are most rebellious* (<sup><BIB></sup>Ezekiel 2:7); but, since that proves to no purpose, he is now for that reason enjoined silence and shall not speak at all to them. Note, Those whose hearts are hardened against conviction are justly deprived of the mans of conviction. Why should not the reprovers be dumb, if, after long trials, it be found that the reprov'd resolve to be deaf? If Ephraim be *joined to idols, let him alone. Thou shalt be dumb, and not be a reprover*, implying that unless he were dumb he would be reproving; if he could speak at all, he would



witness against the wickedness of the wicked. *But when God speaks with him, and designs to speak by him, he will open his mouth*, v. 27. Note, Though God's prophets may be silenced awhile, there will come a time when God will give them the opening of the mouth again. And, when God speaks to his ministers, he not only opens their ears to hear what he says, but opens their mouth to return an answer. Moses, who had a veil on his face when he went down to the people, took it off when he went up again to God, ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 34:34.

**4.** Instead of giving him assurance of success when he should at any time speak to the people, he here leaves the matter very doubtful, and Ezekiel must not perplex and disquiet himself about it, but let it be as it will. *He that hears, let him hear, and he is welcome to the comfort of it; let him hear, and his soul shall live; but he that forbears, let him forbear at his peril, and take what comes. If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it; neither God nor his prophet shall be any losers by it; but the prophet shall be rewarded for his faithfulness in reproving the sinner, and God will have the glory of his justice in condemning him for not taking the reproof.*