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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Ezekiel

by Matthew Henry

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

EZEKIEL

When we entered upon the writings of the prophets, which speak of the *things that should be hereafter*, we seemed to have the same call that St. John had (~~Gen~~ Revelation 4:1), *Come up hither*; but, when we enter upon the prophecy of this book, it is as if the voice said, *Come up higher*; as we go forward in time (for Ezekiel prophesied in the captivity, as Jeremiah prophesied just before it), so we soar upward in discoveries yet more sublime of the divine glory. These waters of the sanctuary still grow deeper; so far are they from being fordable that in some places they are scarcely fathomable; yet, deep as they are, out of them flow streams which *make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High*. As to this prophecy now before us, we may enquire,

I. Concerning the penman of it — it was Ezekiel; his name signifies, *The strength of God*, or one *girt* or *strengthened of God*. He girded up the loins of his mind to the service, and God put strength into him. Whom God calls to any service he will himself enable for it; if he give commission, he will give power to execute it. Ezekiel's name was answered when God said (and no doubt did as he said), *I have made thy face strong against their faces*. The learned Selden, in his book *De Diis Syris*, says that it was the opinion of some of the ancients that the prophet Ezekiel was the same with that Nazaratus Assyrius whom Pythagoras (as himself relates) had for his tutor for some time, and whose lectures he attended. It is agreed that they lived much about the same time; and we have reason to think that many of the Greek philosophers were acquainted with the sacred writings and borrowed some of the best of their notions from them. If we may give credit to the tradition of the Jews, he was put to death by the captives in Babylon, for his faithfulness and boldness in reproving them; it is stated that they dragged him upon the stones till his brains were dashed out. An Arabic historian says that he was put to death and was buried in the

sepulchre of Shem the son of Noah. So Hottinger relates, *Thesaur. Philol. lib. 2 cap. 1*

II. Concerning the date of it — the place whence it is dated and the time when. The scene is laid in Babylon, when it was a *house of bondage* to the *Israel of God*; there the prophecies of this book were preached, there they were written, when the prophet himself, and the people to whom he prophesied, were captives there. Ezekiel and Daniel are the only writing prophets of the Old Testament who lived and prophesied any where but in the land of Israel, except we add Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh to prophesy. Ezekiel prophesied in the beginning of the captivity, Daniel in the latter end of it. It was an indication of God's good-will to them, and his gracious designs concerning them in their affliction, that he raised up prophets among them, both to convince them when, in the beginning of their troubles, they were secure and unhumiliated, which was Ezekiel's business, and to comfort them when, in the latter end of their troubles, they were dejected and discouraged. If the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have used such apt and proper means to cure them.

III. Concerning the matter and scope of it.

1. There is much in it that is very mysterious, dark, and hard to be understood, especially in the beginning and the latter end of it, which therefore the Jewish rabbin forbade the reading of to their young men, till they came to be thirty years of age, lest by the difficulties they met with there they should be prejudiced against the scriptures; but if we read these difficult parts of scripture with humility and reverence, and search them diligently, though we may not be able to untie all the knots we meet with, any more than we can solve all the phenomena in the book of nature, yet we may from them, as from the book of nature, gather a great deal for the confirming of our faith and the encouraging of our hope in the God we worship.

2. Though the visions here be intricate, such as an elephant may swim in, yet the sermons are mostly plain, such as a lamb may wade in; and the chief design of them is to *show God's people their transgressions*, that in their captivity they might be repenting and not repining. It should seem the prophet was constantly attended (for we read of their *sitting before him as God's people sat to hear his words*, 33:31), and that he was occasionally consulted, for we read of the elders of Israel who came to *enquire of the*

Lord by him, 14:1, 3. And as it was of great use to the oppressed captives themselves to have a prophet with them, so it was a testimony to their holy religion against their oppressors who ridiculed it and them.

3. Though the reproofs and the threatenings here are very sharp and bold, yet towards the close of the book very comfortable assurances are given of great mercy God had in store for them; and there, at length, we shall meet with something that has reference to gospel times, and which was to have its accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, of whom indeed this prophet speaks less than almost any of the prophets. But by opening the *terrors of the Lord* he prepares Christ's way. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and so it becomes our *school-master to bring us to Christ*. The visions which were the prophet's credentials we have Ezekiel 1-3, the reproofs and threatenings Ezekiel 4-24 betwixt which and the comforts which we have in the latter part of the book we have messages sent to the nations that bordered upon the land of Israel, whose destruction is foretold (Ezekiel 25-35), to make way for the restoration of God's Israel and the re-establishment of their city and temple, which are foretold Ezekiel 36 to the end. Those who would apply the comforts to themselves must apply the convictions to themselves.