

CHAPTER 2

What our Lord Jesus said to St. Paul (~~4236~~ Acts 26:16) may fitly be applied to the prophet Ezekiel, to whom the same Jesus is here speaking, “Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister.” We have here Ezekiel's ordination to his office, which the vision was designed to fit him for, not to entertain his curiosity with uncommon speculations, but to put him into business. Now here,

- I.** He is commissioned to go as a prophet to the house of Israel, now captives in Babylon, and to deliver God's messages to them from time to time (v. 1-5).
- II.** He is cautioned not to be afraid of them (v. 6).
- III.** He is instructed what to say to them, and has words put into his mouth, signified by the vision of a roll, which he was ordered to eat (v. 7-10), and which, in the next chapter, we find he did eat.

~~4236~~ EZEKIEL 2:1-5

THE PROPHET COMMISSIONED TO REPROVE

The title here given to Ezekiel, as often afterwards, is very observable. God, when he speaks to him, calls him, *Son of man* (v. 1, 3), *Son of Adam*, *Son of the earth*. Daniel is once called so (~~2087~~ Daniel 8:17) and but once; the compellation is used to no other of the prophets but to Ezekiel all along. We may take it,

1. As a humble diminishing title. Lest Ezekiel should be lifted up with the abundance of the revelations, he is put in mind of this, that still he is a *son of man*, a mean, weak, mortal creature. Among other things made known to him, it was necessary he should be made to know this, that he was a *son of man*, and therefore that it was wonderful condescension in God that he was pleased thus to manifest himself to him. Now he is among the living creatures, the angels; yet he must remember that he is himself a man, a dying creature. *What is man, or the son of man*, that he should be thus visited, thus dignified? Though God had here a splendid retinue of holy

angels about his throne, who were ready to go on his errands, yet he passes them all by, and pitches on Ezekiel, a *son of man*, to be his messenger to the *house of Israel*; for we have *this treasure in earthen vessels*, and God's messages sent us by men like ourselves, whose terror shall not *make us afraid* nor *their hand be heavy upon us*. Ezekiel was a priest, but the priesthood was brought low and the honour of it laid in the dust. It therefore became him, and all of his order, to humble themselves, and to lie low, as sons of men, common men. he was now to be employed as a prophet, God's ambassador, and a ruler over the kingdoms (⁽²¹¹⁾Jeremiah 1:10), a post of great honour, but he must remember that he is a *son of man*, and, whatever good he did, it was not by any might of his own, for he was a *son of man*, but in the strength of divine grace, which must therefore have all the glory. Or,

2. We may take it as an honourable dignifying title; for it is one of the titles of the Messiah in the Old Testament (⁽²¹³⁾Daniel 7:13, *I saw one like the Son of man come with the clouds of heaven*), whence Christ borrows the title he often calls himself by, *The Son of man*. The prophets were types of him, as they had near access to God and great authority among men; and therefore as David the king is called the *Lord's anointed*, or *Christ*, so Ezekiel the prophet is called *son of man*.

I. Ezekiel is here set up, and made to stand, that he might receive his commission, v. 1, 2. He is set up,

1. By a divine command: *Son of man, stand upon thy feet*. His lying prostrate was a posture of greater reverence, but his standing up would be a posture of greater readiness and fitness for business. Our adorings of God must not hinder, but rather quicken and excite, our actings for God. He *fell on his face* in a holy fear and awe of God, but he was quickly raised up again; for those that *humble themselves shall be exalted*. God delights no in the dejections of his servants, but the same that brings them low will raise them up; the same that is a Spirit of bondage will be a Spirit of adoption. *Stand, and I will speak to thee*. Note, We may expect that God will speak to us when we stand ready to do what he commands us.

2. By a divine power going along with that command, v. 2. God bade him *stand up*; but, because he had not strength of his own to recover his feet nor courage to face the vision, *the Spirit entered into him* and *set him upon his feet*. Note, God is graciously pleased to work that in us which he

requires of us and raises those whom he bids rise. We must stir up ourselves, and then God will put strength into us; we must *work out our salvation*, and then God will *work in us*. He observed that the Spirit entered into him when Christ spoke to him; for Christ conveys his Spirit by his word as the ordinary means and makes the word effectual by the Spirit. *The Spirit set the prophet upon his feet*, to raise him up from his dejections, for *he is the Comforter*. Thus, in a similar case, Daniel was strengthened by a divine touch (²⁷¹⁸Daniel 10:18) and John was raised by the right hand of Christ laid upon him, ⁶¹¹⁷Revelation 1:17. *The Spirit set him upon his feet*, made him willing and forward to do as he was bidden, and then he *heard him that spoke* to him. He heard the voice before (²⁰⁰⁸Ezekiel 1:28), but now he heard it more distinctly and clearly, heard it and submitted to it. The Spirit sets us upon our feet by inclining our will to our duty, and thereby disposes the understanding to receive the knowledge of it.

II. Ezekiel is here sent, and made to go, with a message to the children of Israel (v. 3): *I send thee to the children of Israel*. God had for many ages been sending to them his servants the prophets, rising up betimes and sending them, but to little purpose; they were now sent into captivity for abusing God's messengers, and yet even there God sends this prophet among them, to try if their ears were open to discipline, now that they were holden in the cords of affliction. As the supports of life, so the means of grace, are continued to us after they have been a thousand times forfeited. Now observe,

1. The rebellion of the people to whom this ambassador is sent; he is sent to reduce them to their allegiance, to bring back the children of Israel to the Lord their God. let the prophet know that there is occasion for his going on this errand, for they are a *rebellious nation* (v. 3), *a rebellious house*, v. 5. They are called *children of Israel*; they retain the name of their pious ancestors, but they have wretchedly degenerated, they have become *Goim* — *nations*, the word commonly used for the Gentiles. The *children of Israel* have become as the *children of the Ethiopian* (³¹⁰⁵Amos 9:7), for they are *rebellious*; and rebels at home are much more provoking to a prince than enemies abroad. Their idolatries and false worships were the sins which, more than any thing, denominated them a *rebellious nation*; for thereby they set up another prince in opposition to their rightful Sovereign, and did homage and paid tribute to the usurper, which is the highest degree of rebellion that can be.

(1.) They had been all along a rebellious generation and had persisted in their rebellion: *They and their fathers have transgressed against me*. Note, Those are not always in the right that have antiquity and the fathers on their side; for there are errors and corruptions of long standing: and it is so far from being an excuse for walking in a bad way that our fathers walked in it that it is really an aggravation, for it is justifying the sin of those that have gone before us. They have continued in their rebellion *even unto this very day*; notwithstanding the various means and methods that have been made use of to reclaim them, *to this day*, when they are under divine rebukes for their rebellion, they continue *rebellious*; many among them, like Ahaz, even *in their distress, trespass yet more*; they are not the better for all the changes that have befallen them, but still remain unchanged.

(2.) They were now hardened in their rebellion. They are *impudent children*, brazen-faced, and cannot blush; they are still-hearted, self-willed, and cannot bend, cannot stoop, neither ashamed nor afraid to sin; they will not be wrought upon by the sense either of honour or duty. We are willing to hope this was not the character of all, but of many, and those perhaps the leading men. Observe,

[1.] God knew this concerning them, how inflexible, how incorrigible, they were. Note, God is perfectly acquainted with every man's true character, whatever his pretensions and professions may be.

[2.] He told the prophet this, that he might know the better how to deal with them and what handle to take them by. He must rebuke such men as those sharply, cuttingly, must deal plainly with them, though they call it *dealing roughly*. God tells him this, that it might be no surprise or stumbling-block to him if he found that his preaching should not make that impression upon them, which he had reason to think it would.

2. The dominion of the prince by whom this ambassador is sent.

(1.) He has authority to command him whom he sends: "*I do send thee unto them, and therefore thou shalt say thus and thus unto them,*" v. 4. Note, it is the prerogative of Christ to send prophets and ministers and to enjoin them their work. St. Paul thanked Christ Jesus who put him into the ministry (⁵⁰¹²1 Timothy 1:12); for, as he was sent of the Father, ministers are sent by him; and as he received the Spirit without measure he gives the Spirit by measure, saying, *Receive you the Holy Ghost*. They are *impudent and rebellious*, and yet *I send thee unto them*. Note, Christ gives the means

of grace to many who he knows will not make a good use of those means, puts many a price into the hand of fools to get wisdom, who not only have no heart to it, but have their hearts turned against it. Thus he will magnify his own grace, justify his own judgment, leave them inexcusable, and make their condemnation more intolerable.

(2.) He has authority by him to command those to whom he sends him: *Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God.* All he said to them must be spoken in God's name, enforced by his authority, and delivered as from him. Christ delivered his doctrines as a Son — *Verily, verily, I say unto you;* the prophets as *servants* — *Thus saith the Lord God,* our Master and yours. Note, The writings of the prophets are the word of God, and so are to be regarded by every one of us.

(3.) He has authority to call those to an account to whom he sends his ambassadors. *Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear,* whether they will attend to the word or turn their backs upon it, *they shall know that there has been a prophet among them,* shall know by experience.

[1.] If they hear and obey, they will know by comfortable experience that the word which did them good was brought to them by one that had a commission from God and a divine power going along with him in the execution of it. Thus those who were converted by St. Paul's preaching are said to be *the seals of his apostleship,* ^{<401>}1 Corinthians 9:2. When men's hearts are made to burn under the word, and their wills to bow to it, then they know and bear the witness in themselves that it is not the *word of men, but of God.*

[2.] If they forbear, if they turn a deaf ear to the word (as it is to be feared they will, *for they are a rebellious house*), yet they shall be made to know that he whom they slighted was indeed a prophet, by the reproaches of their own consciences and the just judgments of God upon them for refusing him; they shall know it to their cost, know it to their confusion, know it by sad experience, what a pernicious dangerous thing it is to despise God's messengers. They shall know by the accomplishment of the threatenings that the prophet who denounced them was sent of God; thus the word will *take hold of men,* ^{<3016>}Zechariah 1:6. Note, *First,* Those to whom the word of God is sent are upon their trial *whether they will hear or whether they will forbear,* and accordingly will their doom be. *Secondly,* Whether we be edified by the word or no, it is certain that God

will be glorified and his word magnified and made honourable. Whether it be a *savour of life unto life* or *of death unto death*, either way it will appear to be of divine original.

EZEKIEL 2:6-10

THE PROPHET CAUTIONED NOT TO FEAR

The prophet, having received his commission, here receives a charge with it. It is a post of honour to which he is advanced, but withal it is a post of service and work, and it is here required of him,

I. That he be bold. He must act in the discharge of this trust with an undaunted courage and resolution, and not be either driven off from his work or made to drive on heavily, by the difficulties and oppositions that he would be likely to meet with in it: *Son of man, be not afraid of them*, v. 6. Note, Those that will do any thing to purpose in the service of God must not be afraid of the face of man; for the fear of men will bring a snare, which will be very entangling to us in the work of God.

1. God tells the prophet what was the character of those to whom he sent him, as before, v. 3, 4. They are *briers and thorns*, scratching, and tearing, and vexing a man, which way soever he turns. They are continually teasing God's prophets and entangling them in their *talk* (⁴²⁵Matthew 22:15); they are *pricking briers* and *grieving thorns*. The best of them is as a brier, and *the most upright sharper than a thorn-hedge*, ³⁰⁸Micah 7:4. Thorns and briers are the fruit of sin and the curse, and of equal date with the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Note, Wicked men, especially the persecutors of God's prophets and people, are as briers and thorns, which are hurtful to the ground, choke the good seed, hinder God's husbandry, are vexatious to his husbandmen; but they are *nigh unto cursing* and *their end is to be burned*. Yet God makes use of them sometimes for the correction and instruction of his people, as *Gideon taught the men of Succoth with thorns and briers*, ⁰⁰⁸⁶Judges 8:16. Yet this is not the worst of their character: they are *scorpions*, venomous and malignant. The sting of a scorpion is a thousand times more hurtful than the scratch of a brier. persecutors are a *generation of vipers*, are of the serpent's seed, and the *poison of asps is under their tongue*; and they are *more subtle than any beast of the field*. And, which makes the prophet's

case the more grievous, he dwells among these scorpions; they are continually about him, so that he cannot be safe nor quiet in his own house; these bad men are his bad neighbours, who thereby have many opportunities, and will let slip none, to do him a mischief. God takes notice of this to the prophet, as Christ to the angel of one of the churches, ⁴¹¹³Revelation 2:13. *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is.* Ezekiel had been, in vision, conversing with angels, but when he comes down from this mount he finds he *dwells with scorpions.*

2. He tells him what would be their conduct towards him, that they would do what they could to frighten him with *their looks* and *their words*; they would hector him and threaten him, would look scornfully and spitefully at him, and do their utmost to face him down and put him out of countenance, that they might drive him off from being a prophet, or at least from telling them of their faults and threatening them with the judgments of God; or, if they could not prevail in this, that they might vex and perplex him, and disturb the repose of his mind. They were now themselves in subjection, divested of all power, so that they had no other way of persecuting the prophet than with *their looks* and *their words*; and so they did persecute him. *Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest,* ²⁴⁰⁵Jeremiah 3:5. If they had had more power, they would have done more mischief. They were now in captivity, smarting for their rebellion, and particularly their misusing God's prophets; and yet they are as bad as ever. *Though thou brag a fool in a mortar, yet will not his foolishness depart from him;* no providences will of themselves humble and reform men, unless the grace of God work with them. But, how malicious soever they were, Ezekiel must not be *afraid of them* nor *dismayed*, he must not be deterred from his work, or any part of it, nor be disheartened or dispirited in it by all their menaces, but go on in it with resolution and cheerfulness, assuring himself of safety under the divine protection.

II. It is required that he be faithful, v. 7.

1. he must be faithful to Christ who sent him: *Thou shalt speak my words unto them.* Note, As it is the honour of prophets that they are entrusted to speak God's words, so it is their duty to cleave closely to them and to speak nothing but what is agreeable to the words of God. Ministers must always speak according to that rule.

2. He must be faithful to the souls of those to whom he was sent: *Whether they will hear of whether they will forbear*, he must deliver his message to them as he received it. He must bring them to comply with the word, and not study to accommodate the word to their humours. "It is true they are *most rebellious*, they are rebellion itself; but, however, *speak my words* to them, whether they are pleasing or displeasing." Note, The untractableness and unprofitableness of people under the word are no good reason why ministers should leave off preaching to them; nor must we decline an opportunity by which good may be done, though we have a great deal of reason to think no good will be done.

III. It is required that he be observant of his instructions.

1. Here is a general intimation what the instructions were that were given him, in the contents of the book which was *spread before him*, v. 10.

(1.) His instructions were large; for the roll was *written within and without*, on the inside and on the outside of the roll. It was as a sheet of paper written on all the four sides. One side contained their sins; the other side contained the judgments of God coming upon them for those sins. Note, God has a great deal to say to his people when they have degenerated and become rebellious.

(2.) His instructions were melancholy. He was sent on a sad errand; the matter contained in the book was, *lamentations, and mourning, and woe*. The idea of his message is taken from the impression it would make upon the minds of those that carefully attended to it; it would set them a weeping and crying out, *Woe! and, Alas!* Both the discoveries of sin and the denunciations of wrath would be matter of lamentation. What could be more lamentable, more mournful, more woeful, than to see a holy happy people sunk into such a state of sin and misery as it appears by the prophecy of this book the Jews were at this time? Ezekiel echoes to Jeremiah's lamentations. Note, Though God is rich in mercy, yet impenitent sinners will find there are even among his words *lamentations and woe*.

2. Here is an express charge given to the prophet to observe his instructions, both in receiving his message and delivering it. he is now to receive it and is here commanded,

(1.) To attend diligently to it: *son of man, hear what I say unto thee*, v. 8. Note, Those that speak from God to others must be sure to hear from God themselves and be obedient to his voice: “*Be not thou rebellious*; do not refuse to go on this errand, or to deliver it; do not fly off, as Jonah did, for fear of disobliging thy countrymen. They are a *rebellious house*, among whom thou livest; but be not thou like them, do not comply with them in any thing that is evil.” If ministers, who are reprovers by office, connive at sin and indulge sinners, either show them not their wickedness or show them not the fatal consequences of it, for fear of displeasing them and getting their ill-will, they hereby make themselves partakers of their guilt and are rebellious like them. If people will not do their duty in reforming, yet let ministers do theirs in reprovng, and they will have the comfort of it in the reflection, whatever the success be, as that prophet had, ²⁸¹⁵ Isaiah 50:5. *The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious*. Even the best of men, when their lot is cast in bad times and places, have need to be cautioned against the worst of crimes.

(2.) To digest it in his own mind by an experience of the favour and power of it: “Do not only *hear what I say unto thee*, but *open thy mouth, and eat that which I give thee*. Prepare to eat it and eat it willingly and with an appetite.” All God's children are content to be at their heavenly father's finding, and to eat whatever he gives them. That which God's hand reached out to Ezekiel was *a roll of a book, or the volume of a book*, a book or scroll of paper or parchment fully written and rolled up. Divine revelation comes to us from the hand of Christ; he gave it to the prophets, ⁶⁰¹ Revelation 1:1. When we look at *the roll of thy book* we must have an eye to the hand by which it is sent to us. He that brought it to the prophet *spread it before him*, that he might now swallow it with an implicit faith, but might fully understand the contents of it, and then receive it and make it his own. *Be not rebellious*, says Christ, but *eat what I give thee*. If we receive not what Christ in his ordinances and providences allots for us, if we submit not to his word and rod, and reconcile not ourselves to both, we shall be accounted rebellious.