



Commentary on Ezekiel - Volume 1

by

John Calvin

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Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| <i>About This Book.</i> | p. ii |
| Commentary on Ezekiel 1-12. | p. 1 |
| Translator's Preface. | p. 2 |
| Beza's Dedication. | p. 18 |
| To the Reader. | p. 23 |
| Chapter 1. | p. 25 |
| Lecture first. | p. 25 |
| Ezekiel 1:1-2. | p. 25 |
| Ezekiel 1:3. | p. 29 |
| Prayer Lecture 1. | p. 31 |
| Lecture second. | p. 31 |
| Ezekiel 1:4. | p. 31 |
| Ezekiel 1:5. | p. 35 |
| Ezekiel 1:6. | p. 35 |
| Ezekiel 1:7. | p. 36 |
| Ezekiel 1:8. | p. 36 |
| Ezekiel 1:9. | p. 37 |
| Prayer Lecture 2. | p. 38 |
| Lecture third. | p. 38 |
| Ezekiel 1:10. | p. 38 |
| Ezekiel 1:11. | p. 39 |
| Ezekiel 1:12. | p. 40 |
| Ezekiel 1:13. | p. 41 |
| Ezekiel 1:14. | p. 43 |
| Ezekiel 1:15. | p. 43 |
| Ezekiel 1:16. | p. 44 |
| Prayer Lecture 3. | p. 45 |
| Lecture fourth. | p. 45 |
| Ezekiel 1:17. | p. 46 |
| Ezekiel 1:18. | p. 46 |
| Ezekiel 1:19. | p. 47 |
| Ezekiel 1:20. | p. 47 |
| Ezekiel 1:21. | p. 48 |
| Ezekiel 1:22. | p. 49 |
| Ezekiel 1:23. | p. 50 |

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Ezekiel 1:24. | p. 50 |
| Prayer Lecture 4. | p. 52 |
| Lecture fifth. | p. 52 |
| Ezekiel 1:25-26. | p. 52 |
| Ezekiel 1:27. | p. 57 |
| Ezekiel 1:28. | p. 57 |
| Prayer Lecture 5. | p. 59 |
| Lecture sixth. | p. 60 |
| Chapter 2. | p. 61 |
| Ezekiel 2:1-2. | p. 61 |
| Ezekiel 2:3. | p. 62 |
| Ezekiel 2:4-5. | p. 66 |
| Prayer Lecture 6. | p. 67 |
| Lecture seventh. | p. 67 |
| Ezekiel 2:6. | p. 68 |
| Ezekiel 2:7. | p. 70 |
| Ezekiel 2:8. | p. 70 |
| Ezekiel 2:9-10. | p. 72 |
| Prayer Lecture 7. | p. 73 |
| Lecture eighth. | p. 74 |
| Chapter 3. | p. 75 |
| Ezekiel 3:1-2. | p. 75 |
| Ezekiel 3:3. | p. 75 |
| Ezekiel 3:4-7. | p. 76 |
| Ezekiel 3:8-9. | p. 79 |
| Ezekiel 3:10-11. | p. 81 |
| Prayer Lecture 8. | p. 82 |
| Lecture ninth. | p. 82 |
| Ezekiel 3:12. | p. 82 |
| Ezekiel 3:13. | p. 83 |
| Ezekiel 3:14. | p. 84 |
| Ezekiel 3:15. | p. 85 |
| Ezekiel 3:16-17. | p. 87 |
| Prayer Lecture 9. | p. 89 |
| Lecture tenth. | p. 89 |
| Ezekiel 3:18. | p. 89 |
| Ezekiel 3:19. | p. 92 |
| Ezekiel 3:20. | p. 93 |
| Prayer Lecture 10. | p. 95 |
| Lecture eleventh. | p. 95 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Ezekiel 3:21. | p. 95 |
| Ezekiel 3:22-23. | p. 96 |
| Ezekiel 3:24. | p. 97 |
| Ezekiel 3:25-26. | p. 98 |
| Ezekiel 3:27. | p. 100 |
| Chapter 4. | p. 101 |
| Ezekiel 4:1-3. | p. 101 |
| Prayer Lecture 11. | p. 102 |
| Lecture twelfth. | p. 102 |
| Ezekiel 4:4-8. | p. 103 |
| Ezekiel 4:9. | p. 108 |
| Ezekiel 4:10-11. | p. 109 |
| Prayer Lecture 12. | p. 109 |
| Lecture thirteenth. | p. 109 |
| Ezekiel 4:12-13. | p. 110 |
| Ezekiel 4:14-15. | p. 110 |
| Ezekiel 4:16-17. | p. 111 |
| Chapter 5. | p. 114 |
| Ezekiel 5:1-4. | p. 114 |
| Prayer Lecture 13. | p. 117 |
| Lecture fourteenth. | p. 117 |
| Ezekiel 5:5-6. | p. 117 |
| Ezekiel 5:7-8. | p. 119 |
| Ezekiel 5:9-10. | p. 121 |
| Ezekiel 5:11. | p. 123 |
| Prayer Lecture 14. | p. 124 |
| Lecture fifteenth. | p. 124 |
| Ezekiel 5:12. | p. 124 |
| Ezekiel 5:13. | p. 125 |
| Ezekiel 5:14. | p. 127 |
| Ezekiel 5:15. | p. 127 |
| Ezekiel 5:16. | p. 129 |
| Ezekiel 5:17. | p. 130 |
| Prayer Lecture 15. | p. 131 |
| Lecture sixteenth. | p. 131 |
| Chapter 6. | p. 132 |
| Ezekiel 6:1-3. | p. 132 |
| Ezekiel 6:4. | p. 134 |
| Ezekiel 6:5. | p. 135 |
| Ezekiel 6:6. | p. 136 |

| | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Ezekiel 6:7. | p. 137 |
| Ezekiel 6:8. | p. 138 |
| Ezekiel 6:9. | p. 138 |
| Prayer Lecture 16. | p. 139 |
| Lecture seventeenth. | p. 139 |
| Ezekiel 6:10. | p. 141 |
| Ezekiel 6:11. | p. 142 |
| Ezekiel 6:12. | p. 143 |
| Ezekiel 6:13. | p. 144 |
| Prayer Lecture 17. | p. 145 |
| Lecture eighteenth. | p. 145 |
| Ezekiel 6:14. | p. 146 |
| Chapter 7. | p. 148 |
| Ezekiel 7:1-2. | p. 148 |
| Ezekiel 7:3. | p. 149 |
| Ezekiel 7:4. | p. 149 |
| Ezekiel 7:5. | p. 150 |
| Ezekiel 7:6. | p. 151 |
| Ezekiel 7:7. | p. 151 |
| Ezekiel 7:8. | p. 153 |
| Prayer Lecture 18. | p. 153 |
| Lecture nineteenth. | p. 153 |
| Ezekiel 7:9. | p. 153 |
| Ezekiel 7:10. | p. 154 |
| Ezekiel 7:11. | p. 155 |
| Ezekiel 7:12. | p. 156 |
| Ezekiel 7:13. | p. 157 |
| Ezekiel 7:14. | p. 159 |
| Ezekiel 7:15. | p. 159 |
| Ezekiel 7:16. | p. 160 |
| Ezekiel 7:17. | p. 160 |
| Ezekiel 7:18. | p. 161 |
| Prayer Lecture 19. | p. 162 |
| Lecture twentieth. | p. 162 |
| Ezekiel 7:19. | p. 162 |
| Ezekiel 7:20. | p. 163 |
| Ezekiel 7:21. | p. 164 |
| Ezekiel 7:22. | p. 165 |
| Ezekiel 7:23. | p. 166 |
| Ezekiel 7:24. | p. 166 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| Ezekiel 7:25. | p. 167 |
| Ezekiel 7:26. | p. 168 |
| Prayer Lecture 20. | p. 169 |
| Lecture twenty first. | p. 169 |
| Ezekiel 7:27. | p. 170 |
| Chapter 8. | p. 172 |
| Ezekiel 8:1. | p. 172 |
| Ezekiel 8:2. | p. 173 |
| Ezekiel 8:3. | p. 174 |
| Ezekiel 8:4. | p. 175 |
| Ezekiel 8:5. | p. 175 |
| Ezekiel 8:6. | p. 176 |
| Prayer Lecture 21. | p. 177 |
| Lecture twenty second. | p. 177 |
| Ezekiel 8:7-11. | p. 178 |
| Ezekiel 8:12. | p. 181 |
| Ezekiel 8:13-14. | p. 182 |
| Prayer Lecture 22. | p. 183 |
| Lecture twenty third. | p. 183 |
| Ezekiel 8:15-16. | p. 183 |
| Ezekiel 8:17. | p. 185 |
| Ezekiel 8:18. | p. 186 |
| Chapter 9. | p. 188 |
| Ezekiel 9:1. | p. 188 |
| Ezekiel 9:2. | p. 188 |
| Ezekiel 9:3-4. | p. 190 |
| Prayer Lecture 23. | p. 191 |
| Lecture twenty fourth. | p. 191 |
| Ezekiel 9:5-6. | p. 193 |
| Ezekiel 9:7. | p. 195 |
| Ezekiel 9:8. | p. 195 |
| Ezekiel 9:9. | p. 197 |
| Prayer Lecture 24. | p. 198 |
| Lecture twenty fifth. | p. 198 |
| Ezekiel 9:10. | p. 199 |
| Ezekiel 9:11. | p. 200 |
| Chapter 10. | p. 201 |
| Ezekiel 10:1. | p. 201 |
| Ezekiel 10:2. | p. 202 |
| Ezekiel 10:3. | p. 204 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Ezekiel 10:4. | p. 204 |
| Ezekiel 10:5. | p. 205 |
| Prayer Lecture 25. | p. 205 |
| Lecture twenty sixth. | p. 205 |
| Ezekiel 10:6-7. | p. 206 |
| Ezekiel 10:8. | p. 206 |
| Ezekiel 10:9. | p. 207 |
| Ezekiel 10:10. | p. 208 |
| Ezekiel 10:11-12. | p. 208 |
| Ezekiel 10:13. | p. 209 |
| Ezekiel 10:14. | p. 210 |
| Ezekiel 10:15. | p. 212 |
| Ezekiel 10:16. | p. 213 |
| Prayer Lecture 26. | p. 213 |
| Lecture twenty seventh. | p. 213 |
| Ezekiel 10:17. | p. 214 |
| Ezekiel 10:18-19. | p. 215 |
| Ezekiel 10:20. | p. 217 |
| Ezekiel 10:21. | p. 218 |
| Ezekiel 10:22. | p. 218 |
| Chapter 11. | p. 220 |
| Ezekiel 11:1-2. | p. 220 |
| Ezekiel 11:3. | p. 221 |
| Prayer Lecture 27. | p. 222 |
| Lecture twenty eighth. | p. 222 |
| Ezekiel 11:4. | p. 222 |
| Ezekiel 11:5. | p. 223 |
| Ezekiel 11:6-7. | p. 224 |
| Ezekiel 11:8-11. | p. 225 |
| Ezekiel 11:12. | p. 228 |
| Ezekiel 11:13. | p. 229 |
| Prayer Lecture 28. | p. 229 |
| Lecture twenty ninth. | p. 229 |
| Ezekiel 11:14-16. | p. 230 |
| Ezekiel 11:17. | p. 234 |
| Ezekiel 11:18. | p. 234 |
| Ezekiel 11:19-20. | p. 235 |
| Prayer Lecture 29. | p. 236 |
| Lecture thirtieth. | p. 236 |
| Ezekiel 11:21. | p. 241 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| Prayer Lecture 30. | p. 242 |
| Lecture thirty first. | p. 242 |
| Ezekiel 11:22-23. | p. 243 |
| Ezekiel 11:24. | p. 243 |
| Ezekiel 11:25. | p. 244 |
| Chapter 12. | p. 246 |
| Ezekiel 12:1-2. | p. 246 |
| Ezekiel 12:3. | p. 247 |
| Ezekiel 12:4. | p. 248 |
| Ezekiel 12:5-6. | p. 248 |
| Ezekiel 12:7. | p. 249 |
| Prayer Lecture 31. | p. 250 |
| Lecture thirty second. | p. 250 |
| Ezekiel 12:8-11. | p. 251 |
| Ezekiel 12:12. | p. 252 |
| Ezekiel 12:13. | p. 254 |
| Ezekiel 12:14. | p. 255 |
| Ezekiel 12:15. | p. 255 |
| Ezekiel 12:16. | p. 256 |
| Prayer Lecture 32. | p. 257 |
| Lecture thirty third. | p. 257 |
| Ezekiel 12:17-19. | p. 258 |
| Ezekiel 12:20. | p. 259 |
| Ezekiel 12:21-23. | p. 260 |
| Ezekiel 12:24. | p. 261 |
| Ezekiel 12:25. | p. 262 |
| Ezekiel 12:26-28. | p. 263 |
| Prayer Lecture 33. | p. 264 |
| Translation of Ezekiel 1-12. | p. 265 |
| Indexes. | p. 266 |
| Index of Scripture References. | p. 266 |
| Index of Scripture Commentary. | p. 268 |
| Greek Words and Phrases. | p. 269 |
| Hebrew Words and Phrases. | p. 269 |
| Latin Words and Phrases. | p. 272 |
| French Words and Phrases. | p. 272 |

**COMMENTARIES
ON THE
FIRST TWENTY CHAPTERS OF THE
BOOK OF THE PROPHET
EZEKIEL**

BY JOHN CALVIN

**NOW FIRST TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN,
AND COLLATED WITH THE FRENCH VERSION:**

BY THOMAS MEYERS, M.A.

VICAR OF SHERIFF-HUTTON, YORKSHIRE

VOLUME FIRST

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

An Interest of no ordinary kind is excited in the mind of the Biblical Student by the mention of "Calvin's Lectures On Ezekiel." The last Work which a great man leaves unfinished, because arrested by the hand of death, becomes at once an heirloom to posterity. After the lapse of nearly three hundred years, we read this affecting sentence with a tear and a sigh: "When this last Lecture was completed, that most illustrious man John Calvin, who had previously been weakened by sickness, then became so much worse that he was compelled to lie on his couch, and could not proceed further in his explanation of Ezekiel: This is the reason why he stopped at the end of the twentieth chapter, and did not complete the work so happily begun." Afflicted as Calvin was for the last few years of his life, the wonder is that he accomplished so much in preaching, lecturing, and dictating; and although we have still to mourn over so much unfinished, we are filled with astonishment at the labors he achieved.

The vigor of his mind and the stores of his learning are amply displayed in his Commentary On Ezekiel. And that the modern reader may enter fully into those valuable explanations of the text which he will find in the ensuing pages, it will be desirable to furnish him with a slight sketch of the times in which this Prophet lived. We shall then add such critical remarks as may illustrate our Author's exposition of the Sacred Text.

"Thy sons shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon," were the ominous words of Isaiah to a king of Judah, and after the lapse of a century they were fulfilled to the letter. Kings, and priests, and nobles, and people were all swept away by the remorseless monarch, and planted here and there along the lenny banks of the river Chebar. There Ezekiel pined in misery among three thousand captives of rank, who, according to Josephus, graced the triumph of Nebuchadnezzar. Either a priest or the son of a priest, (for the sense is doubtful, Ezekiel 1:4,) here he was compelled to linger during twenty-two years of his life, while he was wrapt in prophetic vision, and carried on the wings of the soul to the city of his fathers. Here he tarried in body, while his spirit was at home with the Cherubim within the Temple, among their wings and wheels, and burning movements, and mysterious brightness. Here he often gazed upwards into the firmament above him, and in the clear azure of an eastern sky beheld the sapphire throne, and the appearance of the glory of Jehovah resting majestically upon it! Here he experienced the prophetic inspiration, and was strengthened to proclaim in Jehovah's Name the mysteries of punishments and desolation. He was permitted to enunciate the great truths of God's moral government of his ancient ones — to proclaim the eternal connection between obedience and happiness, transgression and ruin. Nor was he alone in his declarations of vengeance against every man "that setteth up his idols in his heart." When he entered on his office, Jeremiah had completed the thirty-fourth year of his apostleship, and was contemporary with him for at least eight years. Amidst insult, obloquy, and scorn, he proclaimed before the faithless king the coming hosts of the Chaldeans; while Zephaniah was still prophesying in Judaea, and Daniel proclaiming the power of holiness in the land of Babylon.

Ezekiel is remarkably silent as to his personal history, so that we are unable to ascertain his age, at either the commencement or the close of his mission. Josephus supposes him to have been but a youth when hurried from the land of his fathers, but Havernick remarks with justice, that he displays so fully the matured character of a priest in his intimate acquaintance with the details of the Temple service, that he may well be supposed to have attained the age of thirty before his

removal. ¹ The death of his wife is the only personal event to which he refers, in the ninth year of the Captivity, (Ezekiel 24:18,) and it seems probable that he spent the whole of his remaining life on the banks of the Chebar. He had evidently acquired a commanding influence over his fellow-prisoners, as their elders frequently came to enquire concerning God's message at his lips. (Ezekiel 8; Ezekiel 19; Ezekiel 20; Ezekiel 23) The traditions respecting his death are various, but as they rest on no solid foundation, they may be permitted to die out in the obscurity of intentional silence.

Before we can enter with satisfaction into any views of the style and interpretation of an ancient author, it is desirable to ascertain the genuineness and authenticity of the writing on which we are about to comment. And as Biblical Criticism has made great pretensions to advancement since the time of Calvin, it becomes necessary for his modern Editor to be in some degree acquainted with its progress, to be prepared to state some definite conclusions for the guidance of less instructed enquirers.

As to the Genuineness Of Ezekiel's Writings, it has never been seriously called in question by the learned, either Jew or Christian. Some self-sufficient Critics have impugned the last nine chapters: Their valueless arguments will be found, by those who wish to search for such unsatisfactory materials, in Rosenmuller, while their refutation is completed by Jahn, in his Introduction to the Sacred Books of the Old Testament, and is rendered accessible to the mere English reader by Hartwell Horne ² So little weight, however, is attached to such opinions, that even Gesenius allows a "oneness of tone" to be so conspicuous throughout Ezekiel's Prophecies, as to forbid the suspicion that any portions of them are not genuine. This Book formed part of the Canon in the Catalogues of Melito and Origen, of Jerome and of the Talmud. Josephus, indeed, refers to two Books of Ezekiel, probably dividing his *prophecies* into two parts. His language ³ has necessarily given rise to some discussion, which Eichhorn has set at rest as satisfactorily as the data will allow. ⁴

The Arrangement Of The Various Predictions has been the subject of a variety of opinions. Some have supposed that Chronological Order has been interfered with, and that different collections of the separate Prophecies might be made with advantage. But Havernick, in his valuable Commentary, published as late as 1843, maintains that the present arrangement is correct. It proceeds, he asserts, in the order of time, and connects, as it ought to do, the Prophecies against foreign nations with those against Israel and Judah. Hence he divides the Book into the following nine Sections:

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1. The Call to the Prophetic Office. (Ezekiel 1-3:15.)
 2. The Symbolical Representations foretelling the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. (Ezekiel 4:16 through Ezekiel 7.)
 3. A Series of Visions, a year and two months later than the former. In these he is shown the Temple polluted by the worship of Adonis, the consequent vengeance on the priests and people, and the prospect of happier times and a purer worship. (Ezekiel 8-11.)

¹ Havernick, Commentar uber Ezelkiel. Erlangen, 1843, See also Wielder Bibl. Relaworterbuch, art. Ezechiel. Leipsic, 1833.

² Introduction, volume 4.

³ Antiq. 10:5, section 1.

⁴ Einleitung, volume 3

4. A Series of Reproofs and Warnings against the prevailing sins and prejudices of his day. (Ezekiel 12-19.)

5. Another Series of Warnings, one year later, still announcing the coming judgments. (Ezekiel 20-23.)

6. Predictions, two years and five months later, announcing the very day of the Siege Of Jerusalem, and assuring the captives of its complete overthrow. (Ezekiel 24.)

7. Predictions against Foreign Nations. (Ezekiel 25-32.)

8. After the Destruction of the City, The Future Triumph of The Kingdom of God on Earth. (Ezekiel 33-39.)

9. Symbolic Representations of The Times Of Messiah, and the prosperity of the Kingdom of God. (Ezekiel 40-48.)

There is a negative merit in Calvin's Lectures, which has not been imitated by some later Commentators. He never makes those observations on Ezekiel's Style And Diction which would reduce him to the level of a merely human writer. Grotius and Eichhorn, Lowth and Michaelis dwell on his erudition and genius, and assign him the same rank among the Hebrews which Aeschylus holds among the Greeks. They praise his knowledge of architecture, and his skill in oratory. They call him bold, vehement, tragical; "in his sentiments elevated, warm, bitter, indignant; in his images fertile, magnificent, harsh, and sometimes almost deformed; in his diction grand, weighty, austere, rough, and sometimes uncultivated; abounding in repetition, not for the sake of ornament and gracefulness, but through indignation and violence."⁵

Such language as this clearly implies a very different view of the Prophet's character and mission from that taken by Calvin. He looked upon him as a grand instrument in the hands of The Most High, and would have instinctively felt it to be profane thus to reduce him to the level of the Poets and Seers of heathenism. In this feeling we ought to concur. The modern method of criticizing the style and matter of The Hebrew Prophets deserves our warmest reprobation. They are too often treated as if their thoughts and their language were only of human origin. Their visions, their metaphors, and their parables, are submitted to the crucible of a worldly alchemy, in entire forgetfulness that these men were the special messengers of God. To them it was commanded — "The word that I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou speak." "Thou canst not go beyond the word of The Lord, to say less or more." It is not for us to speak, as Bishop Lowth does, of a "remarkable instance of that exaggeration which is deservedly esteemed the characteristic of this poet." And again, of "an image, suggested by the former part of this Prophecy, happily introduced and well pursued." All such language as this, whether in praise or blame of the imagery and expressions of the Prophets of the Old Testament, is highly irreverent. It is scarcely consistent with simple and confiding views of Divine inspiration. They assume principles of interpretation, and of exegesis, totally at variance with that implicit confidence in the plenary inspiration of the Prophets, with which the early reformers were imbued.

And what have we gained by listening to the teachers of Modern Germany, and passing by as antiquated the giant expounders of Geneva? The question is an important one, and the answer to it implies much laborious reading and much patient thought. It requires some acquaintance with the writers on Biblical hermeneutics from Calvin's time to our own — some symmetry of mind to pass a judicial sentence with candor and precision. This, at least, the casual reader may perceive,

⁵ Lowth, *Hebrews Prael.*, 21:279. 8vo, 2nd. ed.

viz., a striking difference between the modern Neologian and the ancient Genevan tone in treating these sublime subjects; and the question will recur, what shall we gain by deserting Calvin and taking up with Eichhorn? That we may present the readers with some data for estimating fairly our defense of Calvin, we will make a few extracts from this well-known writer, selecting him simply as an average specimen from many others of even greater celebrity. In the 545th section of his introduction to the Old Testament, ⁶ he speaks of his “originality,” of “the lively fiction of his inexhaustible imagination,” and of his “gathering materials for his poems.” In a few sections afterwards he adds, that his poems are “inventions,” and “a work” of art, ⁷ and “manifest the wild shoots of a heated imagination.” ⁸

If this be the result of the elaborate researches of modern times, then we may surely throw ourselves back into the arms of older and sounder Commentators. They never delight in banishing The Almighty from his own Word: they never treat him as a stranger in his own land. His agency is with them no intermitting tide, carrying a shifting wave of glory from strand to strand, and leaving only a dreary waste of centuries between, strewn only with the wrecks of his broken workmanship. The long line of Hebrew Seers were either inspired of God, or their writings are deceptions.

Men of Calvin’s faith and devotion believed that beneath the surface of their imagery, and parables, and oriental diction, lay concealed a living power which energized all this glowing machinery, which marshaled the thoughts within the speaker’s mind, and then clothed them in the burning words and the glowing phrases which spoke alternately either joy or sadness to the hearer’s soul. If the proverb of the Royal Sage is true — “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,” then the Master-mind of the Divine Artist touched Ezekiel’s tongue with living flame, and gave his language more elevation, dignity, and majesty, than the most exalted genius, or the richest imagination could accomplish. And if these views be comforting and refreshing to the soul, we “gain a loss” by passing away from Geneva, as it was to Neology as it is. For where are we to stop in our downward course? When we allow ourselves to speak of the traditional creation-week of Moses, or the rocks on which Ezekiel stranded, we are hastening on the high road to the myths of Strauss, or the pantheism of Emerson and Parker.

The voice of an Apostle should still sound in our ears.” Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy or vain deceit,” when we find M. Comte, in his remarkable work “Cours de Philosophie Positive,” speaking of a radical incompatibility between Theology and positive Philosophy — treating as chimerical all attempts to reconcile Modern *Science* with Divine Revelation, and in reliance on the irresistible tendency of our present scientific speculations, entertaining the hope of getting rid of the “Hypothesis of a God.” (Tome 4:51. Lecon.) Our wisdom lies in resisting the first temptation to this downward progress. If we allow Eichhorn and Gesenius to lead us into discussions about the Prophet’s “polite genius” ⁹ instead of his divine inspiration, and to attribute his language to the temper and talent of the man instead of to the guiding power of God’s Holy Spirit, then there is no step of skepticism and infidelity which we may not ultimately reach.

This warning proceeds from no blind admirer of antiquated error, and from no thoughtless despiser of modern science. Let us have the freest and fullest right of search into all the language

⁶ Volume 3. 8vo, Leipsic, 1783.

⁷ Section 547.

⁸ Section 551.

⁹ Einleitung in das A. T., volume 3, and Geschichte der Hebrews Sprache u. Schrift, p. 35.

of Ancient Prophecy: we claim and we court the minutest investigations, while an experience of no limited extent leads us to reject the haughty boastings of the last new skeptics over the writings of men, within the fringes of whose shadow the present generation are not worthy to tread.

It may now fairly *be* enquired, how far Calvin's Interpretations Of The Visions Of Ezekiel have been superseded by the *researches* of modern times? And it may also be asked, whether the speculations of modern German divines — the children of the Reformation — have set aside the Biblical hermeneutics of their great forerunner? Those questions are worthy of our attentive replies.

The general principle of Calvin's Interpretation of The Visions of Ezekiel is an immediate appeal to the miraculous interposition of God. He saw in them God acting directly and powerfully on the Prophet's mind, and through him on the people. He did not consider them as merely illustrating God's general Providence and government of the world, or as portraying any ordinary operations of his grace in the souls of the people; he looked upon them as representing a miraculous and visible *interference* with the ordinary laws of the Nation's discipline. His perception of the obstinacy, ingratitude and perverseness of the *Jews* was so great, that he *considered* their remarkable idolatry and profaneness justified any breach of the laws of nature, with the view of restoring them to *obedience*, and securing their salvation. The moral end to be attained always appeared to him to justify the physical disturbance of the laws which regulate our outward existence. The inestimable value of the soul, when compared with anything earthly, rendered no miracle improbable to his mind, if it only tended to that ultimate result.

Comparing the Interpretations of Calvin with those of modern Continental Divines, we have no reason to conclude that the views of the great Reformer have been superseded. The progress of Biblical Criticism during the last 800 years has indeed been accompanied with some clearer views of the details, but the fundamental principles of these Lectures On Ezekiel have never been successfully impugned. The Miracles of the Old Testament have been boldly assailed, both at home and abroad, and no slight outpouring of infidel wrath has fallen upon the Calvin interpretation of those of Ezekiel. Germany, the birthplace of the Reformation, has been also the seed-bed of spurious Rationalism. The novelty of any opinion on Biblical subjects has now become a sufficient atonement for its absurdity, and he receives the greatest applause from the many, who casts farthest from him whatsoever has commanded the veneration of ages. The direct interposition of Jehovah's power in the affairs of men, as related in the writings of the Hebrews, has lately exercised the ingenuity of German skeptics to an almost incredible extent. The mysticism of the School of Schelling has rivaled the extravagancies of the theory of accommodation proposed by the celebrated Semler.

Professors of theology in various celebrated Universities have arisen, who have rejected with contempt whatever portion of the Old Testament they could not reconcile with their own individual reason, and who have rested their instructions on gratuitous assertions and groundless hypotheses, which make a larger demand on our credulity than the Miracles do on our faith. Eichhorn, Bonsdorf, Rosenmuller, and Wegscheider, are names with which the reader of Foreign Theology has become too familiar. Their theories have now given place to many a later development, including the speculative Christology of Schleiermacher, and the fanciful myths of Strauss. Highly as we value some of the grammatical and philosophical labors of this School of Hebraists, we cannot but deem them morally incompetent to be our guides in Scriptural interpretation. Far from despising the showy guesses of genius, or the solid treasures of learning, we would pause before we tender the homage of our admiration to those who profess to reconcile the study of Divinity with what they term The Enquiring Spirit of the Age. Our reverence must not be withdrawn from the piety and

simplicity of a Calvin, to be prostituted to the praise of a paradoxical erudition, or a perverted ingenuity.

Nor is our view of Calvin as a Commentator overstated, in the opinion of one of the giants of orthodoxy of modern Germany. Hengstenberg, who has earned undying repute by parrying the deadly thrusts of the heroes of Rationalism, Dr. Wette Von Bohlen, Vatke and Hitzig, characterizes Calvin by saying — “This man stands still farther above his followers than above his predecessors. One cannot sufficiently wonder how such a leader could have had such followers. [...] It is impossible for any man who had carefully studied the Commentaries of Calvin to become so thoroughly and consistently superficial, as all of them show themselves to be.” For instance both Von Bohlen and Vatke have asserted that there is no trace of the existence of the Pentateuch in the Older Prophets, and hence they have invented an *argumentum a silentio*, on which they lay it down as an axiom, that the Older Prophets knew nothing of the Pentateuch, and that the Law was for the first time committed to writing about the times of Ezekiel!

Doctrines such as these have been industriously propagated by three critics of great influence, viz., Spencer, Le Clerc, and J. D. Michaelis. The labors of Spencer in his work *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus*, have, in recent times, found a kindred spirit in the virulent hostility of Strauss. In both there is the same icy coldness, the same religious weakness, the same attempt to destroy that sense of God’s presence, so conspicuously honored in Calvin’s Comments on this Prophet and the others. Spencer denies all spiritual meaning to the Visions of God’s agents, and to the appearances of the Cherubim, allowing, indeed, at times, a *ratio mystica et typica*, but retracting it immediately on spiritual meaning being alluded to. The grossness of his idea of God, and the lowness of his views of symbolical interpretation, may be judged of from the following passage: — “Deus interim, ut superstitioni quovis pacto irefur obviam, ritus non paneos, mulforum annorum et gentium usu cohonestatos, quos ineptias norat esse tolerabiles in sacrorum suorum numerum adoptavit.” This shallow and shortsighted system spread rapidly among those who boasted themselves to be disciples of the early Reformation, because they no longer appreciated the spiritual nature of the Prophetic symbols, as so ably explained by Calvin in his Lectures.

After Spencer we have Le Clerc, who is as superficial and as unsatisfying as most Arminians of his School. Whatever indicates a living God — taking interest in the punishment or the consolation of the Hebrews, sending them Prophets to warn and to threaten — he calls anthropomorphism. He only plays with the husk, and finds no kernel. He had a kind of horror of any superhuman interposition: Miracle and Prophecy were alike rejected; everything beyond the operation of merely natural causes was put out of sight and artfully explained away.

At length Michaelis, in his *Mosaisches Recht*, Mosaic Jurisprudence, and in his Annotations for the Unlearned, labored most assiduously to unsettle the foundations of the Biblical Writings as inspired.

The Modern School, who look down contemptuously upon THE Credulity Of The Early Reformers, and fancy themselves emancipated from the trammels of their narrow systems, boasts in its skill of detecting truth by means of Internal Evidence. This is a weapon of two-edged power; and if used in the spirit of an earnest and sober criticism, may be used successfully in support, of the integrity of the Ancient Scriptures. Let the reader, in turning over these Lectures on Ezekiel, endeavor to discover traces of the previous existence of The Pentateuch: let him do for this Prophet what Havernick has done with reference to Hosea and Amos — scrutinizing their writings line by line, and tracing such expressions and idioms as prove them to have been familiar with The Mosaic

Writings, and he will become familiar with the true use of this important instrument of Biblical Exegesis. Let him afterwards consult with diligence and apply with discretion the principles of Hengstenberg's *Christologie des Alter Testaments*. He will find it profoundly learned and unweariedly laborious, illustrating fully the intimations of Ancient Prophecy respecting Messiah's Kingdom. The reader, who has set himself at the feet of Calvin, will discover it to be a most satisfactory exposition of these Predictions. Its candor, and honesty, and accomplished philology, stand out in strong contrast with the arrogance of the Rationalists, and rebukes by its enlightened orthodoxy the reckless skepticism of their system.

Nor are such cautions without their use among ourselves. The inferences from supposed Internal Evidence have, even in our own country, been most wild and baseless. What must be our own danger, when an intimate friend of Southey, Coleridge, and Mackintosh, whose writings produced some influence on the literature of the day, could gravely put forward the following expose of his views: "*I have attained the inference that the feast of Purlin is the Magophonia of Darius; the 31st Ezekiel an elegy on the death of Cyrus killed by the Massagetæ; and the 14th Isaiah an elegy on the death of Cambyzes, both by the same author; whom, on the ground of internal evidence, I am venturing to separate from among the different Prophets, and to call Daniel, and who is, I think, the finest ode writer in the world. Nay, Daniel is to claim of Ezekiel 25 to 32, and Ezekiel 35 to 39; of Jeremiah 46 to 51; and of Isaiah 13 to 23, and Isaiah 11 to 13; but of this last allotment I am doubtful.*" Here we have a fair specimen of the manner in which every unsound opinion may be propagated under the specious plea of respecting the Internal Evidence.

Another extract from the correspondence of this writer will fully justify the warning which we have sounded against the influence of such sophistical comments. "I am busied now in Theology, and have actually drawn up a paper, 'Who wrote the Wisdom of Solomon?' which has for its object to prove that Jesus Christ wrote it: partly from the Internal Evidence of passages descriptive of him, partly from the External Evidence of the extreme veneration in which the Book was held by the Apostolic characters." These verily are the men of our day — the enlightened teachers of a liberal Theology — the despisers of antiquated credulity — and the authors of a new and improved method of interpreting the Oracles of our God!

The charge of credulity may be answered by showing that even some of the chiefs of the Rationalist School have not been free From Its Influence. The Scholars Of Europe Have Not Yet Forgotten That Gesenius was imposed upon by the clumsy forgery of Wagenfeld, who pretended to have discovered a Oreck Translation of the lost Books of Sanchuniatho in a Portuguese monastery.¹⁰ Had he relied a little more on External than Internal Evidence, had he demanded a sight of the Greek Manuscript, and also of the alleged Phœnician stone, he would have saved the discredit of the discovery that a *patois* of Arabic, Maltese, and Italian was palmed upon him for Phœnician, and that the celebrated *Lapis Lydius* of Volney will ever after serve as a landmark to indicate the credulity of this self-satisfied septic.

How painfully interesting it has become to the reader of Calvin to be made acquainted with the manner in which his views of Prophetic Interpretation have been received and adopted by later Biblical Scholars of the Continent. Three hundred years have allowed ample time for the refutation or elucidation of his Comments. The Christian Scholar who still holds fast the form of sound words received through the earliest Reformers, must grievously lament the sad degeneracy of Continental

¹⁰ See Foreign Quarterly Review, volume 19, and volume 20.

Theology. And it may here be desirable to take a slight review of the growth and progress of theories totally opposite to those of Calvin, that, by comparison, the soundness of this illustrious Expounder may become most conspicuous. For the opportunity of doing so, concisely and accurately, we are indebted to a small treatise of Dr. Tholuck's, *Vermischte Schriften grosstentheils Apologetischen Inhalts*. (Miscellaneous writings for the most part Apologetical in their import.)

After the more stirring times of The Reformation had subsided into a peaceful calm, both the LUTHERANISM Of GERMANY, and the CALVINISM Of SWITZERLAND and France, were subject to gradual yet powerful changes. The pietism of Spener and Francke began to lose its hold over the minds of succeeding generations of students. A new race arose, who were destitute of their predecessors' deep and scriptural piety. Infidelity entered Germany through its learned universities, not as it assailed France through wit and mockery. The Sceptics soon rivaled the Pietists in the depth and variety of their Hebrew scholarship, and in their anxiety to spread abroad their new teaching. First came the philosophy of Wolf, who, after banishment from Halle, by Frederick William 1st, returned again with renewed spirit to his labors, and made many disciples. In Theology S. J. Baumgarten became his most successful follower. "It is incredible," says Tholuck, "with what enthusiasm this teacher of the Theology of his time was listened to. Above four hundred theologians, and seven jurists and physicians, sat at the feet of the venerated man, and took down every, even the minutest, word that fell from his lips. Scarcely another class could meet when Baumgarten was holding his! And, now, let any one compare his printed Prelections, as they have come down to us, what dead schematism? what dry tablemaking! and the whole dictated in the most longwinded style!" (P. 12.)

Next came the great apostle of Rationalism in Geneva. the well known Semler, a scholar of Baumgarten's — "a man who, without founding any school of his own, yet carried the torch from which the sparks darted upon the tinder which, on every hand, was scattered among his contemporaries, and kindled a blaze which continues to the present moment.

" (P. 29.) His principle of criticism is thus stated by himself: "The only proof of the Divine authority of a book arises from the internal conviction produced by the truths therein contained; that is, *the fides divina*, which people, for brevity's sake, and also to have the advantage of a biblical, though somewhat obscure mode of speech, have called the Testimony of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the reader." Hence, with regard to The Pentateuch, he adopts the fragmentary hypothesis of Simon and Vitranga, — dismisses from the Canon some of the Historical Books, and throws doubts upon others, which are equally destructive in their tendency. Having set up his own standard of moral improvement to be derived from any book, he sets aside Daniel and The Apocalypse, as peculiarly unsuited to his views; while The New Testament is scarcely more acceptable to him in its integrity than the Old. He treats both as merely temporary and local in their character, as filled with accommodations and modes of speaking adapted to the times, but not permanent for all time. His principles, then, robbed the Scriptures of everything positive, and destroyed the very basis on which objective and eternal truths must rest.

The most surprising portion of the narrative is the unhappy influence of such Biblical views over others. There must have been a preparation in the German mind, as well as in that of Switzerland, before such principles could be received. Had they been put forth in England or in Scotland, they would have died an easy and a hasty death. The spark would never have been raised to a flame, because the touchwood was happily absent. But melancholy is the list., as given by Tholuck, of the Universities and of eminent individuals who gave the whole weight of their

countenance to these pernicious doctrines. Happily this learned writer, in companionship with Neander, Olshausen and Hengstenberg, are permitted to witness the turn of the tide in favor of the long despised Evangelism which so thoroughly pervades these Lectures Of Calvin On Ezekiel.

In reviewing the manner in which Calvin has lectured on the single words and separate phrases of Ezekiel, the mind is naturally led to contemplate his theory of the Theopneustia of the Prophets. No question in Theology has been more fruitful in discussion than that of The Inspiration Of The Hebrew Prophets: it could hardly be otherwise, as their position, as the chief heralds of the future Christianity, forms a preliminary part of The Evidences of The Christian Faith. However lofty and sublime may be the Writings of the Prophets, yet their Divine Authority cannot be fully impressed, without we are persuaded that they are inspired. But a question has always arisen, what is that supernatural and infallible guidance which we understand by *inspiration*, or inspiration? Does it extend to every word that is uttered by the Prophet, or simply to the material and spirit of his message? Calvin, and The Early Reformers, from the very necessity of their position, contended for the Verbal Inspiration of the entire Scriptures. On these, and these alone, they took their stand against The Corruptions of Rome, and they were necessarily compelled to strengthen their position by every imaginable effort, to uphold the authority of the Written Letter.

In these days, this is too often called an “antiquated hypothesis,” and treated as an “exploded theory;” but it is important to observe that the wisest and most learned Christian Commentators have adhered to it, though not, perhaps, with the strictness of Calvin’s literal views. M. Twesten in Germany, and M. Turretin, J. F. Stopfer, and B. Pictet of Switzerland, men eminent for their piety and usefulness, have upheld the Existence, Universality, and Plenitude of Inspiration, though their views involve a slight modification of the sentiments of the Early Reformers. A few references to their Works may here be appropriate, as they are not easily accessible to the English reader. The writings of Henderson, PYE Smith, Dick, and Wilson, are too accessible to need quotation here, but it may be desirable to know what the Modern Pietists of the Continent, who are foremost in the struggle with Neology, feel to be truth on these important points.

M. Twesten, in his *Vorlesung uber die Dogmatik*, extends the idea of Inspiration to all parts of the Bible, but not in an equal degree to every portion.¹¹ This inequality of Inspiration is held as accompanied with the admission of verbal errors, which the lapse of time now renders irremediable. But it is by no means unconnected with clear views of evangelical truth, calmness of thought, and sagacity of discrimination, though not altogether free from the speculative tendencies of the German mind.

M. Turretin, a well known divine of that land which was formerly adorned with the graces and piety of the masterspirits of the Swiss Reformation, in his *Institutio Theologiae Elementicae*, shows how Scripture proves itself Divine, not only by an authoritative appeal to testimony, but by undoubted proofs of its Divinity. “But,” he afterwards adds, “it must not be supposed that these tokens of Divinity shine forth alike and in the same degree in all the Books of Scripture; for as one star differs from another star in brightness, so some Books emit fuller and more dazzling rays of light, and others fewer and feebler, according as they are more or less necessary to the Church, and contain doctrines of more or less moment: so that the Gospels and The Pauline Epistles glow with far richer splendor than the Book of Ruth or Esther.”¹²

¹¹ Nicht gleichmassig.

¹² Loc. 2. quaest. 4.

The language of John Frid. Stopfer is in some degree similar. He distinguishes “The things written in Scripture by the immediate Inspiration of the Holy Spirit from those which are committed to writing only by the Direction of the Holy Spirit. To the former class belong all The Peculiar Doctrines of Salvation, which as they could not be discovered by the principles of reason, could not be made known but by Revelation: to the latter class belong’ all those Truths which, though previously known, required to be inculcated on man, both to arouse him to a sense of his duty and to convince him of his need of a Revealed Salvation. The same class also includes the Historical Facts connected with the illustration and proof of Revealed Doctrines, and pointing out the various steps of Revelation, in the bestowments of grace and in the ministrations of the Church, all of which require to be known, for the fuller explanation of Divine Truth.”¹³

In the *Christian Theology* of M. B. Pictet we find the following passage: — “Il n’est pas necessaire de supposer que l’Esprit de Dieu a toujours diete aux prophetes et aux apotres tousles mots dont ils se sont servis, et qu’il leur a appris tout ce qu’ils escrivoient. Il suffit qu’ils n’ont rien escrit, que par la direction immediate do l’Esprit de Dieu en sorte que cot Esprit n’a jamais permis, qu’ils aient erre dans ce qu’ils out escrit. Agobard, auteur du 9 siecle, dans sa reponse a Fredigise, dit, que c’est une absurdite de croire que le Sainct Esprit ait inspire les termes et les mots... Cependant c’etoit l’Esprit qui les empechoit de tomber dans aucune erreur, non pas meme dans les moindres cheses.”¹⁴

The Theopneustia of M. Gaussen is SO well known, through the English Translation,¹⁵ that it is only necessary to say, that his view of the Plenary Inspiration of Scripture is more stringent than that of our own Writers, Doddridge, Dick, Pye Smith, and Henderson. He contends for “the existence, universality, and plenitude of Theopneustia,” and condemns the theories of those English Divines who “have gone so far as to specify four degrees of Divine Inspiration.” All these distinctions are in his view “chimerical: The Bible itself does not authorize them: the Church during the first eight centuries of the Christian era knew nothing of them; and we believe them to be erroneous and fraught with evil.”

Having thus glanced at a few of the views of the successors of Calvin among his own countrymen, it will not be necessary to advert to the subject at greater length. It will be enough to refer the reader of Calvin On Ezekiel to Dr. Henderson’s able work on Divine Inspiration, being the fourth series of the Congregational Lectures delivered during 1836. He will there find the difficult questions connected with the subject ably, judiciously, and satisfactorily discussed. It is only necessary to mention so accessible a volume to induce the student of Calvin to apply to it for guidance and instruction.

Another boast in which the Rationalists indulge over the early Reformers, consists in their more extensive use of Rabbinical Literature. Hence it becomes necessary to investigate their claim to superior talent and research in turning to account these stores of Cabalistic tradition. We cannot thoroughly estimate the comparative value of the Commentaries of the old and new Reformers, without being well-versed in the contents of the Targums and the follies of the Gemana. Pococke and LIGHTFOOT, GROTIUS And BOCHART, ERNESTI And KEIL have all made Rabbinical and Oriental Learning subservient to the interpretation of the Hebrew Prophets; and in doing so

¹³ Institut. Theol. Polem., volume 2, and volume 3.

¹⁴ Volume 1 50 1 100:16.

¹⁵ S. Bagster, 1841.

have thrown great light upon modes of expression, grammatical usages, and peculiar customs of the Jews. And thus far we are greatly indebted to them. They have unlocked these precious treasures of Eastern tradition with a learned and a liberal hand; they have solved philological difficulties which did not yield to the perseverance and ingenuity of Calvin.

But we are not to be led away by the abuse of this species of learning, in which some of the depreciators of orthodoxy have indulged. Let the reader, for instance, turn to the Christology of the Jews, as illustrated by Bertholdt of Erlangen; let him observe how he mingles the later Hebrew Prophets, the Apocryphal Books, and the works of Philo and JOSEPHUS, and treats them as if on the same level of authority and value. The baseless speculations of "The Book or Zohar," and the extravagant conceits of the "Nezach Israel," are gravely used as the basis of philosophical explanations, which are to supersede the plain, spiritual, and literal interpretations of the holy men of old. The progress of Sacred Criticism, they tell us, in the three centuries which have elapsed since the Reformation, calls upon us to reject the errors of the Schoolmen at Geneva, but still we hesitate to bow down to the dicta of these visionary theorists. We protest against the improper use which they make of the unauthorized comments of foolish and infatuated Jews. These perverters of the sense of Holy Scripture were utterly ignorant of its Spirit. They are the very blindest leaders of the blind. They are the most unspiritual guides, the most puerile corrupters of the Truth, the most contemptible inventors of falsehood. And yet they are upheld as the very authorities on which we are to receive philosophical novelties, and to throw away the joys, and consolations, and blessings of the inspiration of Hebrew Prophecy.¹⁶ Again and again must we repeat the protest., and maintain the eternal principles of childlike faith, and holy zeal, and persevering godliness which adorned and consecrated the valuable labors of the calumniated Teacher Of Switzerland.

In closing our notice of Foreign Theology, we are by no means anxious to foster any undiscerning prejudice against German divinity. We would discriminate between the tares and the wheat, while we protest against the dreamy speculations, the unsound principles, the shallow reasoning, the ostentatious and perverted scholarship, and the irreverent levity with which the Neologians have violated every law of literary evidence, and shocked every feeling of serious piety. On the other hand, we by no means desire to uphold any cramped or exploded interpretation, or to justify any details in Calvin's Comment On Ezekiel which are inconsistent with the real improvements in Hebrew philology. Let but a spirit of disciplined humility prevail, and then our later Churches may hope to rival the elder ones in the wisdom which is from above. The patient and devout use of these additional means which are now within our reach, will lead us to comprehend "the mind of the Spirit," and enable the Christian Commentator to cast the living seed into the stream of time, in the fullest confidence that a fruitful harvest of believers shall spring up, uniting the docility of children with the intelligence of men and. the constancy of martyrs. But to this end, the spirit of the Early Reformers must be cultivated: the spirit of skeptical criticism must be abhorred. Lord Bacon's adage is, alas, too often verified: "Certain there be that delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief:" for in the discursive reading? which we have found necessary for illustrating Calvin's

¹⁶ For an account of "the Book of Zohar" and the "Nezach Israel," see Wolf's *Bibliotheca Heb.*, volumes 2; and 4, also volume 1. Consult also Burcker's *Historia Critic. Phil.*, and the Prolegom. to Bertholdt's *Christol. Judoe.* Various quotations are given by Dr. M'Caul in "The Old Paths," and the subject is treated pointedly and intelligibly by Professor Lee of Cambridge in his *University Sermons*, 1830.

Ezekiel, how often have we met with writings on the Old Testament flippant and irreverent, oscillating' for ever between fact and falsehood.

The Holy page is still undefaced — it is the eye of the self-sufficient Commentator which willingly gathers over it the misty film: the balance of truth remains what it ever was, accurate and sensible: it is the palsied hand which agitates the scales in ceaseless alternation.

While, however, we thus strenuously uphold the general principles of Prophetic Inspiration which Calvin taught, we are willing to concede that many of his attempts to explain the text are unsatisfactory. Thus, for instance, an exception may fairly be made against the conclusiveness of his explanation of the appearance of the cherubim in the tenth chapter of this Prophecy. He accounts for the appearance of the heads of an ox and a man, a lion and an eagle on the same living creature, by asserting that it represents the energizing power of God throughout animated nature. Not content with this general and probably correct exposition, he goes on to derive the motion of all living creatures from that of angels. "Now, when the Lion either roars or exercises his strength, he seems to move by his own inherent power, and so it may be said of other living creatures: but God here says that living beings are in some sense parts of Angels, although not of the same substance."

Instead of explaining how Angels are the powers (*virtutes*) of God, and how he proves any "inseparable connection" between angelic and creative motion, he draws this conclusion from the mysterious emblems of the Cherubim: "Let us understand, then, that while men move about and apply themselves to their various pursuits, and when even wild beasts do the same, yet Angelic motions are underneath, so that neither men nor animals move themselves, but their whole rigor depends on this secret inspiration."

One is surprised that the acute and welltrained mind of Calvin did not perceive that this assertion only shifts the difficulty one step farther back, and that it does not unfold one single law of either the life or motion of animated nature.

The student of Theology, however, must not expect to find in Calvin the correct expositions of the laws of natural phenomena, — the discoveries of the three last Centuries have thrown a flood of light on physical and psychological science. Let the reader distinguish between the theological and scientific explanations of these Lectures; and while he allows the latter to be capable of improvement through the gradual progress of human knowledge, he will value the former as defending and upholding "the truth of God."

It becomes necessary also to caution the reader that he will find these Lectures at times liable to the charge of *overexplanation*. The Lecturer searches with microscopic scrutiny into the hidden meaning of every minute portion of a sentence, and it sometimes occurs in his explanation of Visions, Symbols, and Emblems, that he carries out his method of minute subdivision and verbal comment too far. This concession will readily be made by all who have perused the valuable treatise of Gottlob Ch. Storr on Parabolic Illustration, interspersed as it is with valuable References to Luther and Chrysostom, Ernesti and Lessing, COCCEIUS and Pfaff, Wemyss and Beckhaus.

It must not be considered that Calvin is depreciated, because he is not idolized as infallible. It is now so customary for an Editor to treat his author as a model of perfection, that it requires some degree of moral courage to assert that Calvin could possibly be indiscreet. The daily experience of life, however, convinces us that the wisest, the holiest, and the best are always fallible, and at times inconsiderate.

It may now be desirable to furnish the general reader with a few facts concerning the celebrated Gaspard De Coligny, to whom Beza dedicates these Lectures of his Master. To have been Grand

Admiral of France gives him no title to admiration in the eyes of those who seek for divine, and heavenly, and soulsatisfying truth — but to have been a burning and shining light in Christ's Holy Church in the days of its struggles and persecution, this may afford us an apology for introducing here a short account of his Christian life, and his awful martyrdom.

He was born of a noble family which had been connected with the Government of France for about three hundred years, and was the second of three brothers, all eminent for their devotion to God's saving truth. The eldest became a Cardinal, and Gaspard consequently took possession of the paternal estate as Seigneur of Chatillon. After serving his country both by land and sea., and arriving at the high offices of both General and Admiral, he retired for a while from the distractions of public life to his residence at Chatillon, about the age of forty-three. Here both he and his excellent wife, Charlotte De La Val, study together the Word of God, and grow gradually stronger in the faith and hopes of the Gospel. Being' fully aware of the suffering's they must undergo, and the sacrifices they must make, and in defiance of all the edicts of persecution which they saw daily enforced around them, they persevere in reading the Writings of the Reformers, and opening' their minds without reserve to the beams of the New Light, they resolve both to do and to suffer God's will, as soon as they shall learn it. At length this Christian pair are joined by his brothers — Odet, the Cardinal, and Francis, the Colonel — and thenceforth they become a noble brotherhood of searchers for Divine guidance, of one mind and of one spirit, each equally earnest to be found after the image of their Redeemer.

About five years before Beza addressed him in the following dedication, the Queen Mother Of France had sent for Coligny to give his advice respecting the proper remedies for the discontent of the people. He boldly assigned Persecution for Religion as its cause, and advised the passing of an Edict of Toleration, in opposition to the arbitrary injustice of the House of Guise. He next stands by the Prince. Or Code, who is seized, imprisoned, and. condemned to death, but rescued from the scaffold by the decease of the king. But in a short period the enmity of the Duke Of Guise against the Hugonots became deadly, and 3000 Protestants, according to Beza, are "stabbed, stoned, beheaded, strangled, burned, buried alive, starved, drowned, suffocated." Fearful wars and dreadful massacres arise, and after the assassination of the Duke Of Guise, on the 18th February 1563, Coligny retired to Chatillon, and was probably living in retirement there, when Beza announced to him the decease of Calvin.

The remainder of his history is most melancholy. The Duke Of Alva, a most inveterate persecutor of the Reformers, now gained an ascendancy over the mind of the Queen and her Council. Civil war again rages between the Romish and the Protestant parties. The Admiral is again forced into the field, the battle of Moncontour is fought and lost on the 1st of October 1569, and Coligny is wounded severely in the face. Massacre and murder rage more fiercely than ever, till at length, in the very Palace of the King, at Paris, Coligny is shot at, and seriously wounded in two places. His days are now numbered. Although both the King and Queen pay him visits of condolence, after the fingers of his right hand are cut off, he soon falls a victim to the vengeance of his foes. The fatal ST. Bartholomew Massacre is planned, and the Duke of Guise declares it to be the kings pleasure that Coligny should be the first victim. The King relents, but it is too late; the Duke is gone to the Admiral's hotel. His slaughterers stab their way to the Admiral's presence, and find him prepared to die. The sword is thrust through his body, and his corpse, dishonored by the Duke, is given up to the insults of the mob. For seven long' days and nights the streets of Paris run with blood, and its river is choked with corpses. The King and his family, and many of his nobles, went

to pray in public, and to offer thanksgiving to God for the success of these measures, as if resulting in his glory. And after a while they proceed to decree that the body of the Sieur De Coligny should be dragged through the streets, and then hung' up on Montfaucon, to the execration of the people; that his Castle at Chatillon should be leveled to the ground, and all his estate laid waste; that his children should be unable to hold property; and that for all future time this infamous transaction should be annually handed down to posterity by Public Prayers and Processions throughout the capital of France.¹⁷

The blood of the faithful at Paris was not sufficient: Throughout the cities of the provinces similar butcheries took place. The head of the Romish Church exulted also: The Pope and the Cardinals proceeded in solemn pomp to offer public thanksgiving before the altar; the ramparts of St. Angelo resounded with the thundering of artillery, while the Cardinal Lorraine celebrated solemn service in the Church of St. Louis, and attributed the slaughter of the heretics to the inspiration of God, in the presence of the sovereign Pontiff — an awful leaf in the history of Europe, which must be turned over again and again, that our children's children may be familiar with these dreadful deeds of Anti-christ.¹⁸

On one occasion, Beza, the writer of this address to Coligny came in close contact with this Cardinal Lorraine; for on the 9th of September 1561, a remarkable meeting was held at Poissy, near Paris, called a Colloquy, for the public discussion of the Reformed and the Unreformed doctrines. The Letter which the mother of Charles IX. wrote to Pope Pius IV., with reference to this meeting, is very characteristic of those times. It states that the Reformed had become so powerful and so numerous, that the measure was both salutary and needful. The Pope replies most mildly, and foreseeing that it would lead to the accomplishment of his long wished for desire — the recognition of

Legate in France — leaves all to his faithful Cardinal of Lorraine. Safe-conduct was given to many leading Reformers, among whom were Theodore Beza and Peter Martyr. Beza asked permission to open the Conference by prayer, and obtained it; and such a prayer the majority of the debaters had never heard before. He then spoke boldly, ably, and like a thorough Christian. The Cardinal replied, with great plausibility and policy; and, after many meetings, no practical objects seemed to be gained. The Prince Of Conde, Coligny, and the Chancellor L'hospital, were the leading Politicians; and in the following January the Assembly of Notables was assembled at St. Germain. An Edict of Toleration was passed, which it was hoped would prove the Magna Charta of the spiritual liberties of France. But Providence ordered it otherwise, and mysteriously allowed the sacred bands of Calvin, Beza, and Martyr, to be laid low by the ax and the sword, and the progress of the Reformation to be arrested, just as it was about to burst forth as a Spiritual Reformation For Europe.

It now only remains to observe, that this Translation has been made by a careful comparison of the Latin with the French Editions; that those of Geneva, published in 1617 and 1565, have been adopted as the basis, while the reprints of 1563, 1565, 1583, and that at Amsterdam in 1667, have been consulted. No license whatever has been taken with the text, the Translation being' uniformly

¹⁷ See Lansdowe MSS. in Brit. Museum. William Cecil, grandson of Lord Burghley, was present at one anniversary. The Duke of Sully was an eyewitness. His Remains, Book 1, contain much information respecting Coligny and his contemporaries. Sec. Edit., Lond. 1756.

¹⁸ See Villeroy's Memoirs of State, volume 2. Also Mattieu Hist. France, volume 1. book 6. De Thou, book 52 and 53. And Sully's Memoirs, book 1.

as close and literal as the English idiom will admit. The Translator has carefully avoided all expression of private opinion on doctrinal and speculative points; he has not softened off any of the occasional roughness of the original views of his Author, nor has he encumbered his pages with long footnotes, either to rectify or elucidate the criticisms of the text. His object has been, not to present his readers with the views and expositions of other Commentators, but to present Calvin, with all his excellencies and defects, before the English reader, in language as clear and simple as the various difficulties of the subject will allow, he has not introduced quotations from other Divines, who have ably and impartially treated similar subjects, but, at certain intervals, (as for instance at the close of Ezekiel 10,) he has pointed out the Authors from whose Works much valuable information may be obtained.

The Translator may venture here to express his opinion, once for all, that Calvin's Hebrew philology is not always correct: his critical exposition of the meaning and derivation of Hebrew words should seldom be received as the best possible. The labors of GESENIUS and Rosenmuller have thrown great light upon this department of Sacred scholarship, and the results of such modern labors will be found ably condensed and adapted to the wants of the ordinary reader, in the Notes to Bishop Newcome's "*Literal Translation of the Prophets*," rendered very accessible in Tegg's Edition of 1836. This work is very valuable for conciseness, accuracy, and the intelligible application of real learning.

Instead of distracting the attention by a variety of incoherent foot notes, it is intended to close the Second Volume of this Translation with the following Addenda, as a contribution towards a complete *Apparatus Criticus*: —

1. A copious Index Of Words, Phrases, And Things, occurring in these Lectures, on the basis of the original Latin *Index Locupletissimus*.
2. An Index Of The Places Of Scripture illustrated in these Lectures.
3. A List Of The Sacred And Profane Authors quoted by Calvin, with references.
4. A Complete Synopsis Of The Contents Of The Whole Of Ezekiel's Prophecies
5. A Connected Translation Of Calvin's Version Of The First Twenty Chapters, With A New Translation Of The Remaining Chapters
6. A List Of The Chief Interpreters, Ancient And Modern
7. A Notice Of The Ancient Versions And Codexes Which Contain Ezekiel's Prophecies
8. A few Dissertations on important subjects illustrating these Lectures, with references to various modern Treatises, philological, exegetical, and hermeneutical.

There is prefixed to the present Volume a faithful and *spirited facsimile* of a very rare Portrait Of Calvin, which the monogram shows to have been engraved by Henry Hondius, or De Hondt the elder, an artist of considerable eminence, who was born at Duffel, in Brabant, about 1573, and died at La Haye in 1610. Among other works, he engraved Portraits of John Wickliffe, Philip Melancthon, John Bugenhagen, John Knox, and Jerome Savonarola.

It may be worth noticing, that Jodocus Hondius, or de Hondt, (who is also called Henry Hondius the younger,) was the son of Jodocus Hondius, or de Hondt Jost, a Flemish engraver, born at Ghendt in 1563, and probably a brother of Henry the elder, who fled to England in consequence of the troubles in the Low Countries. He engraved maps and portraits, constructed mathematical instruments, founded printing types, etc. Henry the younger studied the art of engraving under his uncle, Henry the elder, and finished many of his father's plates after his death. He engraved a number of portraits in a very neat style, which are still highly esteemed.

The old copies of the Latin and French Editions of this valuable Commentary, having remarkable Title pages, copies *in facsimile* follow this Introductory Notice.

T. M.

SHERIFFHUTTON VICARAGE,

March 1849.

DEDICATION

To The Most Noble Sire, Illustrious For Piety, ¹⁹

And Other Christian Virtues,

D. GASPAR DE COLIGNY,

*Grand Admiral Of France, Theodore Beza, Minister Of The Church Of Geneva, Wishes Health
And Peace From The Lord.*

Although I am sure, most Noble Sire, that you are accustomed to profit much by the other writings of that great and truly excellent servant of God, John Calvin, and that you will also fully enjoy this last swanlike song' of his, yet I do not doubt that the same feelings will affect you when reading, as they do me while writing, namely, that at the name of such a man, that recent grief, which we felt so severely at his death, will break out again with the heaviest sense of our loss. And truly this sorrow is the more just and necessary, since it neither can nor ought to be hastily put away from us, so that I think it quite lawful for us to indulge it.

As to the tempests which, of late years, God's Church has sustained,, no one can be ignorant of them, since they have shaken the whole world, so that we can now use that expression — "What region of the World is not full of our sufferings?"

But many have not sufficiently taken notice, ²⁰ with what defenders our Religion has been protected. The Lord has raised you up like Gideons and Samsons, not only in Germany, but in England and Scotland; and also lately, under the auspices of the most illustrious Prince or Conde, in our France, who, when your own life was in danger, through a variety of perils, turned away the swords of certain opponents from the necks of the pious. And, in truth, the chief enemies of the Church are not flesh and blood, since these can only injure the 'body. Therefore, although that is in reality a most excellent gift of God, and your praise is very great, even before the angels of God, because at a most seasonable crisis so formidable an attack was averted by your prowess; yet with far other enemies, and with far other weapons, must we make war, and even now do we contend; and this contest, although not so formidable in appearance, yet is really more dangerous, because it involves the ruin of the whole family of God. I speak of spiritual wickedness, by which Satan endeavors to infect the doctrine, and to corrupt the morals; and if these are lost, the Church must not only be injured, but perish entirely. In carrying on this war, there are doubtless those leaders whom God has appointed Pastors, Teachers, and Presbyters of his Church, for this very purpose, that, by teaching, convincing, and praying, they may administer the kingdom of the Son of God; for these are the arms by which hostile forces are to be overcome. If you judge by names alone, you will find them numerous enough; if by reality, you will find them but few. Yet this our age has many of this kind, of whose constancy and labors we ourselves are the fruit and the harvest. But that the world is unworthy of such, this fact declares, that within three years, at a most unsuitable juncture, we have lost the very best and bravest; so that indeed, out of those mighty heroes who, in our time, so bravely and so successfully have thrown down Antichrist from his seat, we now

¹⁹ The French has "mirror and example of piety."

²⁰ The French reads — "But the evil is, that few have observed who those have been who have taken up the defense of religion."

behold but very few surviving, as Henry Bullinger, by God's goodness, lately preserved to us from the pestilence, William Farrel, that old man of invincible strength, and Peter Viret, even up to this time contending in the Church at Lyons with success, even in the very front of the battle. Philip Melancthon was the first who fell in this last slaughter; next to him fell Peter the Martyr, when he had returned to his charge at Zurich, after the Assembly at Poissy. After him followed Wolfgang Musculus, and then Andrew Hyperius, as if the hand of the smiting Deity turned itself from north to south; for Melancthon died in Saxony, Hyperius in Hesse, and the two others in Switzerland. Alas! what great men, and how dearly beloved!

Yet, while John Calvin was alive, all these calamities were lightened; for that great man, far superior to others, while he was safe, made all other losses, however great, seem but light. And behold, our sins have snatched him also away from us last year, and no one can estimate the loss which The Church has suffered, unless those who were eyewitnesses of his labors. For what did that man not achieve? Who was to be compared with him in Meetings, in Lecturing, and in Writings. Who was shorter in teaching, and yet more solid — more happy in solving difficulties, more vehement in reproving, sweeter in consoling, and more correct in confuting errors? I know that, on the one hand, there are some Epicureans who laugh at what I say, (for will they not deride the servant when they mock at his Load?) and, on the other hand, that stupid and foolish men, to whom ignorance is the highest wisdom, despise it. Yet, I know this, that there is none among the more cunning enemies of God who does not silently think of him the same as I do. Each faction among the followers of Antichrist has and praises its own patron, and that, too, not without depreciating others. But may that stupid and profane ambition be far from us! We boast of neither Cephas, nor Paul, nor Apollos. Our language of Canaan is one! we have one Lord, by whom we swear.

But since there are different offices for the limbs of the same body, we prefer eyes to hands and feet; and since there are so many eyes of so large a body, we feel some more efficacious than others; but we praise and adore God in each part of this body. May this praise be offered entirely to our God and Lord; and he who does not perceive that we owe thanks for Calvin in a peculiar sense, has no judgment! But to what purpose are these remarks? There is this sweetness in these celestial goods, that by their recollection alone they most singularly profit and delight us. Hence the benefit of examples in both ways; nor is there any other end and scope of Sacred History, than that we should be affected while reading it, just as if we beheld the events themselves. So in that grief, with which all pious and good men ought 'to be affected by the death of so great a man, and especially those who received daily almost incredible advantages from his presence, by his remarkable teaching and his wonderful prudence, two things ought chiefly to console us: One, that we are in no slight degree assisted by his recent and most beautiful examples of both sayings and doings, until also we ourselves, when the course of our navigation is finished, may be conveyed to the same port. The other, that no one has existed within our memory to whom it has been permitted to leave so many and such exact monuments of his doctrine; for, if God had granted to us for another year or two the enjoyment of so great a light, I do not see what could be wanting to the perfect understanding of the Books of either Covenant! There remain the Books called Historical, except Joshua, also Job and the two Books of Solomon, which he has not illustrated by his Commentaries; although his Discourses on Job, Samuel, and the First Book of Kings, will partly supply this want to the French, as they were received from his mouth. For this great man obtained from the Lord this gift also, that he spoke not much otherwise than he wrote. Of the Prophets, he illustrated Isaiah with complete Commentaries: his Lectures on the remaining Prophets are extant, edited with the

greatest diligence and fidelity by two of his disciples, endued with learning and piety, John Bude, son of the great Bude, and Charles De Jonviller. But his premature death prevented him from completing Ezekiel, which is the more to be lamented by the Church, because this Prophet, especially towards the last, is the most obscure of all, and I know not who will ever arise to complete this picture commenced by such an Apelles!

We think that we have little reason to render an account why we have determined to edit this imperfect work. If any one should chance to ask, Why I have dedicated it to you rather than to any one else? I plainly tell him, that Calvin is responsible for it, on the principle of every one deciding as he pleases in things which concern himself, and that for most just and important reasons I have purposely done the very same that he also wished.

Why, then, should I not assent to his judgment, who in your absence admired and plainly perceived those surprising endowments of both body and mind, of which I was myself an eyewitness during twenty months, both in peace and war. But he said that in the Preface to his Works he trod in the footsteps of Paul, who salutes some persons by name in his Epistles with this special intention, that he might set before the Churches certain chosen men to be looked at by the rest., by whose examples they might be excited to true piety and to other virtues. As to the truth of his judgment concerning you, how many and what certain testimonies can be offered, if either your modesty would allow you to be praised to your *face*, or if it were proper to seek them, as if it were a matter of doubt? But there will be another opportunity, and I hope a more suitable one, of discussing these things.

I now prefer treating another point more pleasing to you, a man of exalted station, and yet the least ambitious of all. I had rather exhort you, most Noble Sire, with all diligence, to do what you are already doing, and have most successfully begun — not only to read, hear, and meditate upon these sacred things continually, and to use them really; but also, that you apply yourself to defend and preserve the Churches by all just means consistent with your dignity and fortitude of mind. Your mortal enemies, and those of all pious men, do not disguise the fact that you are especially aimed at by those who think that they themselves cannot exist if Religion is preserved. But I do not know you, if these very dangers do not rather sharpen than relax your courage. You yourself have most strikingly felt and experienced God's care in defending his own. Your innocence and integrity sufficiently defend you against all accusations. You possess, if any of your rank does, that inward and invincible guard within the breast, which profane men call a wall of brass — I mean a good conscience, in reliance upon which, believe me, you will easily surpass all your adversaries.

In these contests nothing will strengthen you so much as a diligent comparison of the Prophetic with the Historic Writings. For here the events of the future are not falsely conjectured, as mankind are accustomed to do, from an observation of past events. Here no doubtful counsels are taken, no events are obstructed by a chance coincidence of second causes; but you enter, as it were, into the very plans of the Almighty; you behold the true causes, beginning, progress, and end of all changes; and those, too, plainly and clearly declared. For although the Prophets have their enigmas, yet to those who carefully compare all things among themselves, and are acquainted with the idioms of the Prophets, and thus compare their predictions with the events themselves, all things become so plain, that you seem to look down from above upon all human things, especially while relying upon that faithful Leader, who can lead you through a sure path in the midst of impassable and inaccessible places. Nor is there any cause why these things should be despised, as already spread abroad; or be neglected, as the relation of things long ago obsolete, as certain little wits of this day esteem

them. For the Prophets do not treat of small and plebeian things, as some who are unskilled in these matters suppose, but concerning the greatest Monarchies, far surpassing any of these days; about the state of the greatest Kings and Princes; about the great God of Hosts sitting in judgment on the preservation and destruction of the greatest States — such are the contents of these Books. For in those times, the Kings, although profane and impious, never did what many do now, who are so ashamed of asking counsel of God speaking' through his servants, that they are utterly careless of that; and dare to accuse of ambition the faithful servants of God, while discharging their duty. Indeed, there was not at that time any Nation, as all Sacred and Profane Historians testify, which decided on measures of importance, without first consulting its Prophets. And while I say this, I would not place the Ministers of the Word on the throne of Kings or Princes, or any other Magistrates, nor would I favor the ambition of any; but I state what is a fact, and what experience itself has lately proved, as I remember that you, most noble Sire, both perceived and expressed in good time.

Lastly, while I am saying something about the times, their fashion changes, I confess; but there is the same Lord, the same Providence, the same mercy towards the righteous, the same indignation towards the ungodly. But there are those perpetual and invariable, and, therefore, firmer laws of development,²¹ than are found in even Mathematics themselves; since, if there is any firmness and consistency in events of any kind, it all depends upon the nature and will of God. We shall find the clearest declarations of these principles, not only generally as in the Law, but also particularly, in the Prophetic Writings, if we only compare past times with our own, and with the objects of our daily inquiry. Do you want an example? It is just four years ago since, at the Council at Poissy, The French Churches promised themselves the greatest peace and tranquillity, and their adversaries did not know where to turn themselves; but thus our man of God, at that time dedicating his Lectures On Daniel to those Churches, broke forth into these words: “But, if we must fight any longer, (as I announce to you that severer contests than ye think for are in store for you,) with whatsoever madness the rage of the impious may burst forth, so as to rouse up the very depths themselves, remember that your course is determined by the celestial Master of the race; whose laws ye ought to obey with the greater alacrity, because he supplies strength to his own even unto the end.” That he denounced this in a spirit truly prophetic, while the majority were anticipating the contrary, the numberless calamities which immediately followed declare; and of these no end even yet appears.]Do you ask, whence came that prediction? Certainly not from that most deceptive and profane divination of Astrology, which he of all others used to condemn from God's Word, but from those very Prophetic Books which he was then interpreting. Since, therefore, he saw the same evils prevalent in France, on account of which God was accustomed to chastise His people most severely, and to take vengeance on his enemies with just penalties, why should he not pronounce float the same inflictions hung over the impenitent?

In like manner, Luther foresaw and predicted The Late Slaughters In Germany, through contempt of God's Word; and I wish that he had noticed better their principal causes. So also, at this very time, it is not difficult to perceive that throughout France, and especially among those who ought to know better, not only are notorious superstitions and manifest idolatries defended, but even open Epicureanism and horrible blasphemies, unheard of in all former times, are tolerated by all men

²¹ ἀποδείξεων principia. The French has simply “maximes,” which is not strong enough. The comparison with Mathematics is excellent, and suggests a mathematical expression.

hearing and laughing, since at length no place is left for justice and equity, and edicts and laws are enacted in vain. Who, then, is so blind that he cannot see horrible punishments hanging over the authors and defenders of these crimes, and possibly even over the whole kingdom? And in this instance I wish I may be a false prophet! For surely heaven and earth shall pass away, before God will permit these things to remain unrevenge — things which would horrify even the Turks! — and the longer their punishment is delayed, the heavier it will appear when it does come. I know that some will deride these things, as even Noah himself was derided: some also will vehemently accuse them, as Jeremiah was esteemed a man of strife. But, nevertheless, the truth of God will stand firm.

I pray God, therefore, most noble Sire, first, that He would specially endue his Majesty the King with all holy virtues, which, since it is already partly accomplished, all hope and wish may be continued. Next, I pray God to grant him many Counselors like thee and a few others, endowed — I say it without flattery — with the sacred prudence of His Spirit, and zeal for piety and justice, which is the symbol of Royal Majesty, by whose counsels so many faults may be seriously corrected, and a holy and just government happily instituted by the Sacred Word of God and the authority of the Royal Majesty. Lastly, I pray that God would happily establish and preserve you, with your truly Christian wife and children, and your most noble brothers and their holy families, and, lastly, all the assembly of the pious, who, after God and the King, look up to the most illustrious Prince Of Conde, concerning whom I hope to have another opportunity of speaking, and to thee, and to the rest of the pious and religious Nobility throughout France.

[THEODORE BEZA]

GENEVA, January 18th, 1565.

CHARLES DE JONVILLER, TO ALL TRULY CHRISTIAN READERS. HEALTH.

Although our most accomplished and faithful Pastor Theodore Beza, with his singular dexterity and happy tact, seems not to have omitted anything in his Dedication of these Lectures to that most noble hero, and most pious Admiral or Franks, yet those who attentively peruse my remarks, and look upon them with a candid mind, will not judge my few observations superfluous; but I trust they will admit them to be rather grateful and useful to all the pious. And, first of all, no words can sufficiently express how severe a loss The Church Of God has suffered, in the summons from this life to eternal rest, which that illustrious and really divine man, our parent, John Calvin, has received; whether you look at the perpetual consistency of his life, or at his remarkable learning, combined with his exalted piety. For who ever surpassed him in sanctity of morals, in incredible suavity, in unbroken magnanimity, in singular tolerance, nay even in the highest virtues? And as to his wonderful erudition, his multitudinous Writings plainly bear witness to it; some of these being already published, and the rest, with God's permission, will shortly see the light, to the manifest advantage of the pious. For many of his productions are extant, either as extracted from his discourses or preserved by his friends, as those Letters, in both French and Latin, sent to all classes of men, from which it is very evident with what an acute and happy wit he was endued, and with what a clear and sound judgment he was gifted. But I will here say no more on this subject, lest I should seem to dwell upon what is out of place. It will be enough just to touch on a few things which belong especially to these Lectures.

On the 20th of January 1563, when John Calvin began to interpret Ezekiel, in the Public School, although he was continually afflicted by various severe diseases, so that he was often carried to his duties in a chair or on horseback, in consequence of the weakness of his declining health; neither during the whole year did the violence of his maladies prevent his discharging the duty of preaching and reading. At length, about the first of February in the following year, he had advanced as far as the end of the twentieth chapter, with the exception of four verses, and then he was compelled to remain at home, and to confine himself almost always to his bed. In the meantime, during his illness, he was continually meditating, or dictating, or even writing something: so that during the time of his confinement to the house, through ill health, it is scarcely credible how much he accomplished. Among other things, he yew diligently revised the greater part of these Lectures, as is evident by the copy corrected with his own hand, which I have carefully preserved with the rest.

But we must all regret, most sincerely, that as he was most skillful in explaining the teaching of the Prophets, he was prevented by death from completing his Comments On Ezekiel; for no pious man is ignorant that the following portion of this Prophet's writings is very necessary to the Church of God. How desirable, then, that they should have been illustrated by such a man! That this loss may be in some degree remedied, in deference to the wishes of some persons of great weight and learning, that it would be more satisfactory to publish these Lectures at once, than to suppress them any longer, since they will prove so useful to all the pious, my beloved brother, John Buds, and myself, have willingly undertaken the duty, relying on their judgment. We have spared neither expense, nor trouble, nor labor, in publishing the Lectures as soon as possible; and, God willing, we will shortly take care to translate them into French, for the benefit of our people, as our French Version of the Lectures On Jeremiah, put to press nine months ago, is now just finished; so that, unless I am mistaken, our people, who do not understand Latin, will reap great profit. And

that nothing should be omitted in this Latin edition, we have taken care that whatever *errata* had occurred in printing, they are noticed at the end. And since in this book a very great treasure is included, a very copious Index has been compiled by a learned man, through whose guidance its inexhaustible riches may be readily obtained, without any trouble. Another Index is added, of those places of Scripture which are quoted and explained.

In editing these last Lectures, we have used the same industry, diligence, and fidelity, which we exercised in the others already published. There is no necessity for my explaining more at length what I have previously made known with sufficient clearness, as to the manner in which we have retained what are received from Calvin's extemporary pronounciation.

It remains, therefore, most excellent Readers, that you now enjoy the labors of so great a man, and acknowledge whatever fruit you receive as springing from the Great and Good God, and that to Him you render cordially immortal thanks. You will yourselves judge better and more surely the profit which you receive from their perusal, than I could express in many words. Farewell, then, and may it always be appointed that your studies may all tend to the glory of God.

[CHARLES DE JONVILLER.]

GENEVA, January 18th, 1565.

(August 1st, 1565. The date of the French Translation.)

CHAPTER 1

LECTURE FIRST

Ezekiel himself explains at the very beginning of his Book, at what period he discharged the prophetic office; and on this depends the knowledge of his argument. For unless we understand how God stirred him up, we can with difficulty enter into his spirit, and shall be unable to receive any just fruit from his instruction. It is necessary, therefore, to begin from this point: namely, *the time of his Prophecy*: for he says:

Ezekiel 1:1-2

1. Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, mensis, et ego ²² in medio Captivitatis, ²³ super as I *was* among the captives by the river of fluvium Chebar aperti sunt coeli, et vidi visiones Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw Dei. visions of God.

2. In the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity. 2. In quinta mensis, ipse est annus quintus captivitatis regis Joiakim.

We see that the Prophet was called to the office of a Teacher in the fifth year after Jehoiachin had voluntarily surrendered himself to the king of Babylon, (2 Kings 24:15); and had been dragged into exile, together with his mother: for it was, says he, "in the thirtieth year." The greater part of the Commentators follow the Chaldee Paraphrast, and understand him to date from the finding of the Book of the Law. It is quite clear, flint this year was the eighteenth of king Josiah; but in my computation, I do not subscribe to the opinion of those who adopt this date. For this phrase — "the thirtieth year," would then appear too obscure and 'forced. We nowhere read that succeeding writers adopted this date as a standard. Besides, there is no doubt that the usual method among the Jews was to begin to reckon from a Jubilee. For this was a point of starting for the future. I therefore do not doubt that this *thirtieth year* is reckoned from the Jubilee. Nor is my opinion a new one; for Jerome makes mention of it, although he altogether rejects it, through being deceived by an opposite opinion. But since it is certain that the Jews used this method of computation, and made a beginning from *Jobel*, that is, the Jubilee, this best explains *the thirtieth year* If any one should object, that we do not read that this eighteenth year of king Josiah was the usual year in which every one returned to his own lands, (Leviticus 25) and liberty was given to the slaves, and the entire restoration of the whole people took place, yet the answer is easy, although we cannot ascertain in what year the *Jobel* fell, it is sufficient for us to assign the Jubilee to this year, because the Jews followed the custom of numbering their years from this institution. As, then, the Greeks had their Olympiads, the Romans their Consuls, and thence their computation of annals; so also the Hebrews were

²² That is, when I was. — Calvin.

²³ Among the Captives. — Calvin.

accustomed to begin from the year *Jobel*, when they counted their years on to the next restoration, which I have just mentioned. It is therefore probable that this was a Jubilee year — it is probable, then, that this was *the Jubilee*. For it is said that Josiah celebrated the passover with such magnificent pomp and splendor, that there had been nothing like it since the time of Samuel. (2 Chronicles 35:18.) The conjecture which best explains this is, not that he celebrated the passover even with such magnificence, but that he was induced to do so by the peculiar occasion, when the people were restored and returned to their possessions, and the slaves were set free. Since, then, this was the Jubilee, the pious king was induced to celebrate the passover with far greater splendor than was usual — nay, even to surpass David and Solomon. Again, although he reigned thirteen years afterwards, we do not read that he celebrated any passover with remarkable splendor. We do not doubt as to his yearly celebration; for this was customary. (2 Kings 23:23.) From this we conclude that the celebration before us was extraordinary, and that the year was *Jobel*. But though it is not expressed in Scripture, it is sufficient for us that the Prophet reckoned the years according to the accustomed manner of the people. For he says, that this was “the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity:” who is called also Jehoiakim; for Jehoiakim succeeded Josiah, and reigned eleven years. The thirteen years which remain of Josiah’s reign and these eleven, make twenty-four. (2 Kings 23:36.) Now, “his successor,” Jehoiachin, passed immediately into the hands of king Nebuchadnezzar, and was taken captive at the beginning of his reign, and reigned only three or four months. (2 Kings 24:8.) After that, the last king, Zedekiah, was set up by the will of the king of Babylon. We see, therefore, that nine years are made up: add the space of the reign of Jehoiachin: so it is no longer doubtful as to the reckoning of “the thirtieth year” from the eighteenth of king Josiah. It is true that the Law of God was found during this year, (2 Chronicles 34:14,) but the Prophet here accommodates himself to the received rule and custom.

We must now come to the intention of God in appointing Ezekiel as his Prophet. For thirty-five years Jeremiah had not ceased to cry aloud, but to little purpose. When, therefore, this Prophet Jeremiah was so occupied, God wished to give him a coadjutor. Nor was it but a slight relief when at Jerusalem Jeremiah became aware that the Holy Spirit was speaking through another mouth in harmony with himself; for by this means the truth of his teaching was confirmed. In the thirteenth year of Josiah, Jeremiah undertook the prophetic office: (Jeremiah 1:2:) eighteen years remain: add the eleven years of Jehoiakim, and it will make twenty-nine: then add another year, and five more, and we shall have thirty-five years. This then was his hard province, to cry aloud continually for thirty-five years, to the deaf, nay, even to the insane. God, therefore, that he might succor his servant, gave him an ally who should teach the same things at Babylon which Jeremiah had not desisted from proclaiming at Jerusalem. He profited not only the captives, but also the rest of the people who still remained in the city and the land. As far as the captives were concerned, this confirmation was necessary for them: for they had false Prophets there, as we learn from Jeremiah 29:21; there was Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah; they proudly boasted that they were endued with the Spirit of revelation; they promised the people marvels, they derided the softness of those who had left their country, they said that they were determined to fight to the very last, and to run the risk of their lives rather than voluntarily give up the inheritance of divine promise. In this way they insulted the captives. After this there was Shemaiah the Nehelamite, (Jeremiah 29:24,) who wrote to the high priest Zephaniah, and reproached him for being careless and *neglectful*, because he did not severely punish Jeremiah as an impostor and a fanatic, and a false intruder into the prophetic office. Since, therefore, the Devil had his busy agents there, God stationed his Prophet

there, and hence we see how useful, nay, how necessary it was, that Ezekiel should discharge his prophetic office there. But the utility of his instructions extended much further, since those at Jerusalem were compelled to listen to the prophecies which Ezekiel uttered in Chaldea. When they saw that his prophecies agreed with those of Jeremiah, it necessarily happened that they would at least enquire into the cause of this *coincidence*. For it is not natural that one Prophet at Jerusalem, and another in Chaldea, should utter their prophecies, as it were, in the same key, just as two singers unite their voices in accordance with each other. For no melody can be devised more perfectly complete than that which appears between these two servants of God. Now we see the meaning of what our Prophet says concerning “the years.” *In the thirtieth year: then in the fourth month*, (the word month being understood,) and *in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives*

Before I proceed any farther, I will briefly touch on the subjects which Ezekiel treats. He has all things in common with Jeremiah, as I have said, with this peculiarity, that he denounces the last slaughter against the people, because they ceased not to heap iniquity upon iniquity, and thereby inflamed still more and more the vengeance of God. He threatens them, therefore, and that not once only, because such was the hard-heartedness of the people, that it was not enough to utter the threatenings of God three or four times, unless he should continually impress them. But, at the same time, he shows the causes why God determined to treat his people so severely; namely, because they were contaminated with many superstitions, because they were perfidious, avaricious, cruel, and full of rapine, given up to luxury and depraved by lust: all these things are united by our Prophet, that he may show that the vengeance of God is not too severe, since the people had arrived at the very last pitch of impiety and all wickedness. At the same time, he gives them, here and there, some taste of the mercy of God. For all threats are vain, unless some promise of favor is held out. Nay, the vengeance of God, as soon as it is displayed, drives men to despair, and despair casts them headlong into madness: for as soon as any one apprehends the anger of God, he is necessarily agitated, and then, like a raging beast, he wages war with God himself. For this reason, I said, that all threats are vain without a taste of the mercy of God. The Prophets always argue with men with no other intention than that of stirring them up to penitence, which they could never effect unless God could be reconciled to those who had been alienated from him. This then is the reason why our Prophet, as well as Jeremiah, when they reprove the people, temper their asperity by the interposition of promises. He also prophesies against heathen nations, like Jeremiah, especially against the children of Ammon, the Moabites, the Tyrians, the Egyptians, and the Assyrians. (Jeremiah 26-29.) But from the fortieth chapter he treats more fully and copiously concerning the restoration of the Temple and the city. He there professedly announces, that a new state of the people would arise, in which both the royal dignity would flourish again, and the priesthood would recover its ancient excellence, and, to the end of the book, he unfolds the singular benefits of God, which were to be hoped for after the close of the seventy years. Here it is useful to remember what we observed in the case of Jeremiah: (Jeremiah 28:) while the false Prophets were promising the people a return after three or five years, the true Prophets were predicting what would really happen, that the people might submit themselves patiently to God, and that length of time might not interrupt their calm submission to his just corrections.

As we now understand what our Prophet is treating, and the tendency as well as the substance of his teaching, I will proceed with the context.

He says: *as I was among the captives* While some skillfully explain the words of the Prophet, they think that he was not in reality in the midst of the exiles, but refer this to a vision, as if; when

he uses the word “among,” signifying “in the midst,” its sense could be, that he was in the assembly of the whole people: but his intention is far otherwise, for he uses the above phrase that he may show that he was an exile together with the rest, and yet that the prophetic spirit was granted to him in that polluted land. Hence the words, “among the captives,” or, “in the midst of the captives,” do not mean the assembly, but simply narrate, that, though the Prophet was far from the Sacred Land, yet the hand of God was extended to him there, that he might excel in the prophetic gift. Hence the folly of those is refuted, who deny to our Prophet the possession of any spirit of revelation before he went into exile. Although they do not err so much through mistake and ignorance as through willful stupidity; for the Jews took nothing so ill as the thought of God’s reigning beyond the sacred land. To this day, indeed, they are hardened, because they are dispersed through the whole world, and scattered through all regions, and yet retain much of their ancient pride. But then, when there was any hope of return, this profanation seemed to them scarcely tolerable, if the truth of God were to shine forth elsewhere than in the holy land, but especially in the Temple. The Prophet then shows, that he was called to the office of instruction when he was in the midst of the exiles, and one among them. God’s inestimable goodness is conspicuous in this, because he called the Prophet, as it were, from the abyss: for Babylon was a profound abyss: hence the Spirit of God emerged with its own instrument, that is, brought forth this man, who should be the minister and herald of his vengeance as well as of his favor. We see, therefore, how wonderfully God drew light out of darkness, when our Prophet was called to his office during his exile. In the meantime, although his doctrine ought to be useful to the Jews still remaining in this country, yet God wished them not to return to him without some mark of their disgrace. For, because they had despised all the prophecies which had been uttered at home, in the Temple, the Sanctuary, and on Mount Zion, these prophecies were now to issue forth from that cursed land, and from a master who was sunk, as I have said, in that profound abyss. We see then, that God chastised their impious contempt of his instructions, not without putting them to shame. For a long time Isaiah had discharged the prophetic office; then came Jeremiah: but the people ever remained just as they formerly were. Since then prophecy when flowing freely from the very fountain was despised by the Jews, God raised up a Prophet in Chaldea. Blow, therefore, we see the full meaning of the clause.

He says, “*by the river of Chebar*,” which many understand to mean the Euphrates, but they assign no reason, except their not finding any other celebrated river in that country; for the Tigris loses its name after flowing into the Euphrates, and on this account they think the Euphrates is called Chebar. But we are ignorant of the region to which our Prophet was banished: perhaps it was Mesopotamia, or else beyond Chaldea, and besides, since the Euphrates has many tributaries, it is probable that each has its own name. But since all is uncertainty, I had rather leave the matter in suspense. Because the Prophet received his vision on the banks of the river, some argue from this, that the waters were, as it were dedicated to revelations, and when they assign the cause, they say that water is lighter than earth, and as a prophet must necessarily rise above the earth, so water is suitable for revelations. Some connect this with ablution, and think that baptism is prefigured. But I pass by these subtleties which vanish of themselves, and very willingly do I leave them, because in this way Scripture would lose all its solidity: conjectures of this kind are very plausible, but we ought to seek in Scripture sure and firm teaching; in which we can acquiesce. Some for instance torture this passage, “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept,” (Psalm 137:1,) as if the people betook themselves to their banks to pray and worship; when the situation of that country only is described, as being watered by many rivers, as I have just mentioned.

He says, *the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God* God opens his heavens, not that they are opened in reality, but when, by removing every obstacle, he allows the eye of the faithful to penetrate even to his celestial glory; for if the heavens were cleft a thousand times, yet what great brightness must it be to arrive at the glory of God? The sun appears small to us, yet it far exceeds the earth in size. Then the other planets, except the moon, are all like small sparks, and so are the stars. Since, therefore, light itself grows dark before our glance penetrates thus far, how can our sight ascend to the incomprehensible glory of God? It follows therefore when God opens the heavens, that he also gives new eyesight to his servants, to supply their deficiency to pierce not only the intervening space, but even its tenth or hundredth part. So, when Stephen saw the heavens open, (Acts 7:56,) his eyes were doubtless illuminated with unusual powers of perceiving far more than men can behold. So, at the baptism of Christ, the heavens were opened, (Matthew 3:16,) that is, God made it appear to John the Baptist, as if he were carried above the clouds. In this sense the Prophet uses the words, *the heavens were opened*, He adds, *I saw visions of God* Some think that this means most excellent visions, because anything excellent is called in Scripture divine, as lofty mountains and trees are called mountains and trees of God; but this seems too tame. I have no doubt but that he calls prophetic inspiration “visions of God,” and thus professes himself sent by God, because he put off as it were his human infirmities when God intrusted to him the office of instructor. And we need not wonder that he uses this phrase, because it was thought incredible that any prophet could arise out of Chaldea. Nathaniel asked whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth, and yet Nazareth was in the Holy Land. How then could the Jews be persuaded that the light of celestial doctrine could shine in Chaldea, and that any testimony to the grace of God could spring from thence? and that there also God exercised judgment by the mouth of a Prophet? This would never have been believed unless the calling of God had been marked in some signal and especial manner. Since he next adds, *this was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity*, (or Jechoniah, or Jechaniah,) it is plain that by these very words he reproves the obstinacy of the people. For when God afflicts us severely, at first we are much agitated, but by degrees we necessarily become submissive. Since, however, the willfulness of the people was not subdued during these five years, we infer that they persevered in rebellion against God. Nor does he spare those who remained at Jerusalem, for these took credit to themselves for not going into exile with their brethren, and so they despised them, as we often find in Jeremiah. Since then those who remained at home pleased themselves and thought their lot the best, the Prophet here marks the time, because it was necessary to allay their ferocity, and since they resisted the prophecies of Jeremiah, to use a second hammer that they might be completely broken in pieces. This is the reason why he speaks of *the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity*.

Ezekiel 1:3

3. The word of the LORD came expressly 3. Fuit sermo Iehovae ad Ezechielem filium unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the Buzi sacerdotem, in terra Chaldaeorum, super land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and fluvium Chebar: et fuit super eum illic manus the hand of the LORD was there upon him. Iehovae.

He does not repeat the *copula* which was placed at the beginning of the first verse, and we may perhaps wonder why the book should begin with a *copula*: for when he says, “*and* it came to pass,” it seems to denote something going before it, and it seems out of place when nothing precedes it. But probably an oblique antithesis or comparison is intended between those prophecies which had flourished for a long period at Jerusalem, which was their peculiar and genuine seat, and that which was arising in Chaldea; as if he would say, “*even* among Chaldaeans,” for the particle , *vau*, is often used in the sense of , *gam*, “*even*.” The sense therefore is, after God had exercised his servants even to weariness, since many prophets had discharged their duties at Jerusalem, now at length he speaks in Chaldea. He says, therefore, “*the* word of the Lord came unto him.” I know not why some dream that Jeremiah is here called “*Buzi*,” unless because it was a foolish persuasion of the Jews, that the *father* of a prophet is never mentioned unless he were a prophet himself. Their ignorance is proved on other occasions, and here surely their curiosity is shameful, since they decide this *Buzi* to be a prophet, and because they know of no one else, they fix on Jeremiah: as if it were probable, that when the father was left at Jerusalem, the son was an exile, which is entirely conjectural. But because he was a priest; so he says, “*the son of Buzi*.” Our Prophet ought to have some reputation, for if he had been of plebeian obscurity, he would scarcely have been listened to. The priestly dignity, then, availed something towards securing attention. Now he expresses what I have previously mentioned, *in the land of Chaldea*, as if he had said: although God has not been accustomed to raise up prophets in lands so distant and polluted, yet now his rule is changed, for even among the Chaldeans is one endued with the prophetic spirit. And the particle , *illic*, “*there*,” is emphatically added, “*was there upon him*,” says he. For otherwise the Jews would have dreaded Ezekiel, as if he were a monster, when they found that the word of God had proceeded from Chaldea. “*What*,” say they, “*will God pollute and contaminate his doctrine, by its springing up from such a place as that? Who are the Chaldeans, that God should erect his seat there? Mount Zion is his dwelling-place: here he is worshipped and invoked. Here must his lamp burn of necessity, as he has often witnessed by his prophets.*” To such taunts the Prophet; replies: God has begun to speak in Chaldea — there his power is conspicuous: “*The word of the Lord is come unto me; for we know that God alone is to be heard, and that prophets are only to be attended to, as far as they utter what proceeds from him.*” Hence it is required that all teachers of the Church should first have been learners, so that God alone may retain his own rights, and be the only Lord and Master. As then supreme authority resides in God alone, when prophets desire to be heard, they profess not to offer their own comments, but faithfully to deliver a message from God. Thus also our Prophet. I touch these points rather lightly now, as I have treated them more at length elsewhere. At length he adds, *the hand of the Lord was upon him* Some explain the word “*hand*” by “*prophecy*,” but this seems to me weak and poor: I take “*hand*” to mean divine power, as if Ezekiel had said that he was endued with divine power, so that it should be quite clear that he was chosen a Prophet. The hand of God, then, was a proof of new favor, so that Ezekiel might subject; to his own sway all the captives, since he carried with him the authority of God. This may also be referred to the efficacy of his doctrine. For the Lord not only suggests words to his servants, but also works by the secret influence of his Spirit, and suffers not their labors to be in vain. The passage then may be received in this sense. But since the Prophet only assumes to himself what was necessary, and so claims for himself the position and standing of a Prophet, so when he uses the word “*hand*,” I do not doubt his meaning to be an inward operation. There is, it is admitted, an inward efficacy of the Holy Spirit when he sheds forth his power upon hearers, that they may embrace a discourse by faith, so also if all hearers

were deaf, and God's word should evaporate as smoke, yet there is an intrinsic virtue in the prophecies themselves: Ezekiel points out this as given to him by God. Here I shall finish, because I should be compelled to break off directly, and we shall be coming to the vision, which is the most difficult of all.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou didst bless thy people with the continued grace of thy Spirit when it was cast out of its inheritance, and didst raise up a Prophet even from the lowest depths, who should recall it to life when it was all but despaired of — O grant, that although the Church in these days is miserably afflicted by thy hand, we may not be destitute of thy consolation, but show us, through thy pity, that life may be looked for even in the midst of death; so that we may bear all thy chastisements patiently, until thou shalt show thyself our reconciled Father, and thus at length we may be gathered into that happy kingdom, where we shall enjoy our full felicity, in Jesus Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE SECOND.

A Vision is now to occupy our attention, whose obscurity so deterred the Jews that they forbade every attempt to explain it. But God appeared to his Prophet either in vain or not in vain: it is most absurd to suppose the former — then if the vision is useful, it is necessary for us to attain at least a partial understanding of it. If any one object that the vision was exclusively intended for the Prophet — the objection is easily answered, for what the Prophet wrote was clearly for the use of the whole Church. Now, if any one asks whether the vision is lucid, I confess its obscurity, and that I can scarcely understand it: but yet into what God has set before us, it is not only lawful and useful but necessary to enquire. Base indeed would be our sloth should we willingly close our eyes and not attend to the vision. We shall perhaps but skim the surface of what God wills: yet this is of no small moment, and not only a moderate but a slight degree of understanding may suffice for this. Thus briefly do I finish my preface, and come to the words of the Prophet: —

Ezekiel 1:4

4. And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind 4. Et vidi, et ecce ventus furbinis ²⁴ veniens came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire ab Aquilone: nubes magna, et ignis involutus ²⁵ infolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it, et splendor ei undique: et e medio ejus tanquam and out of the midst thereof as the colour of facies Hasmal e medio ignis. amber, out of the midst of the fire.

²⁴ Or *tempestuous*. — Calvin.

²⁵ Or *twisted*. — Calvin.

We must first consider the intention of this Vision. I have no doubt but that God wished first to invest his servant with authority, and then to inspire the people with terror. When therefore a formidable form of God is here described, it ought first to be referred to reverence for the teaching conveyed; for, as we have remarked before, and shall further observe as we proceed, the Prophet's duty lay among a hard-hearted and rebellious people; their arrogance required to be subdued, for otherwise the Prophet had spoken to the deaf. But God had another end in view. An analogy or resemblance is to be held between this vision and the Prophet's doctrine. This is one object. Then as to the vision itself, some understand by the four animals the four seasons of the year, and think that the power of God in the government of the whole world is here celebrated. But that sense is far-fetched. Some think that the four virtues are represented — because, as they say, the image of justice is conspicuous in man, that of prudence in the eagle, of fortitude in the lion, of endurance in the ox. Yet although this is a shrewd conjecture it has no solidity. Some take the contrary view, and think that four passions are here intended, viz. fear and hope, sorrow and joy. Some think that three faculties of the mind are denoted. For in the soul, τὸ λόγικον, is the seat of reason; θύμικον, that of the passions; ἐπιθυμητικόν, that of the lusts; and συντέρεσις that of the conscience. But these guesses are also puerile. It was formerly the received opinion, that under this figure were depicted the four Evangelists: they think Matthew was compared to a man, because he begins with the generation of Christ; Mark to a lion, because he begins at the preaching of John; Luke to an ox, because he begins his narrative by mentioning the priesthood; and John to an eagle, because he penetrates, as it were, to the secrets of heaven. But in this fiction there is no stability, for it would all vanish if it were to be properly examined. Some think it a description of the glow of God in the Church, and that the animals are here to be taken for the perfect who have already made greater progress in faith, and the wheels for the weak and undisciplined. But they afterwards heap together many trifles, which it is better to bury at once, and not take up our time ill refuting them. All these, then, I reject; and now we must see what the Prophet really does mean. I have already said, that it was the Almighty's plan, when he gave commands to his Prophet so to honor him, that his doctrine should not be open to contempt. But the special reason which I touched upon must be considered — viz.: that God shortly points out by this symbol, for what purpose he sends his Prophet. For the visions have as great a likeness to the doctrine as possible. For this reason, in my opinion, Ezekiel says, *behold! a whirlwind came out of the north* The people had already experienced the vengeance of God, Mien he had used first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians to chastise them. Jeconiah, as we have seen, had gone into voluntary exile. The Jews thought that they would still have a quiet home in their city and country, and laughed at the simplicity of those who had so quickly gone into exile. The Prophet therefore says, that he *saw a stormy wind from the north* This rush of the wind or tempest ought to be referred to the judgment of God: for he wished to strike terror into the Jews, that they should not grow torpid in their security. After he has spoken concerning the storm or tempest, he adds — *I saw four living creatures and four wheels connected together*, to signify that their motion had not originated from chance but from God. These two things ought to be joined together, viz.: that the storm sprang up out of the north, and that God, the author of the storm, was beheld upon his throne. But in the meanwhile, that God's majesty might the Jews, he says — *I saw four living creatures and four wheels connected together* By the four living' creatures he understands cherubim: and we have no need of any other explanation, for he explains it so in chapter 10., when he saw God in the temple, the four living creatures were under his feet, and he says they are

cherubim. Now we must see why four animals are here enumerated, when two cherubim only embraced the Ark of the Covenant; and next, why he describes four heads to *each*: for if he wished to accommodate his language to the rites of the Sanctuary, why did he not place two cherubim, with which God was content? (Exodus 20:18;) for he seems here to depart from the command of God himself: (Numbers 7:89) now, four heads and round feet, do not suit the two cherubim by whom the Ark of the Covenant was surrounded. But the solution is at hand: the Prophet so alludes to the Sanctuary, or, at the same time, to bend his discourse to the rudeness of the people. For their religion had become so obsolete, and their contempt of the law so great, that the Jews were ignorant of the use of the Sanctuary; then they so worshipped God as if he were at a distance from them, and entirely rejected his providential care over human affairs. Here, then, we see how gross was their stupor, so that though often stricken, they never were aroused. Because the Jews were thus completely torpid, it became needful to propose to them a new form, and so the Prophet chooses half of it from the Sanctuary itself, and assumes the other half, as it was required for so rude a people; although he did not manufacture anything out of his own mind, for I am now speaking of the counsel of the Holy Spirit. God was, therefore, unwilling to drive the Jews away from the sanctuary, for that was the foundation of all right understanding of truth, but because he saw that the legal form was not sufficient, he therefore added a new supply, and as he gave each cherub four heads, so he wished their number to be four.

With regard to their number, I doubt not that God wished to teach us that his influence is diffused through all regions of the world, for we know the world to be divided into four parts; and that the people might know that God's providence rules everywhere throughout the world, four cherubim were set up. Here also it is convenient to repeat, that angels were represented by cherubim and seraphim: for those who are called cherubim here and in Ezekiel 10, are called seraphim in Isaiah 6:2; and we know that angels are called principalities and powers, (Ephesians 3:10,) and are rendered conspicuous by these titles, while Scripture calls them the very hands of God himself. (Colossians 1:16.) Since, therefore, God works by angels, and uses them as ministers of his power, then when angels are brought forward, there the *providence* of God is conspicuous, and his power in the government of the world. This, then, is the reason why not two cherubim only were placed before the Prophet's eyes, but four: because God's providence ought to be evident in earthly things, for the people then imagined that God was confined to heaven; hence the Prophet teaches not only that he reigns in heaven, but that he rules over earthly affairs. And for this reason, and with this end, he extends his power over the four quarters of the globe. Why, then, has each animal four heads? I answer, that by this, angelic virtue is proved to reside in all the animals. Yet a part is put for the whole, because God by his angels works not only in man and other animals, but throughout creation; and because inanimate things have no motion in themselves, as God wished to instruct a rude and dull people, he sets before them the image of all things under that of animals. With reference, then, to living creatures, man holds the first place, *because* he was formed after the image of God, and the lion reigns over the wild-beasts, but the ox, because he is most useful, represents all domestic animals, or, as they are usually called, *tame* animals. Since the eagle is a royal bird, all birds are comprehended under this word; and here I am not fabricating allegories, but only explaining the literal sense; for it seems to me sufficiently plain, that God signifies angelic inspiration by the four cherubim, and extends it to the four regions of the earth. Now, as it is equally clear that no creature moves by itself, but that all motions are by the secret, instinct of God, therefore each cherub has four heads, as if it were said that angels administer God's empire not in one part of the world only,

but everywhere; and next, that all creatures are so impelled as if they were joined together with angels themselves. The Prophet then ascribes four heads to each, because if we can trust our eyes when observing the manner in which God governs the world, that angelic virtue will appear in every motion: it is then, in fact, just as if angels had the heads of all animals: that is, comprehended within themselves openly and conspicuously all elements and all parts of the world; — thus much concerning the four heads.

As to the four wheels, I do not doubt their signifying those changes which we commonly call revolutions: for we see the world continually changing and putting on, as it were, new faces, *each* being represented by a fresh revolution of the wheel, effected by either its own or by some external impulse. Since, then, there exists no fixed condition of the world, but continual changes are discerned, the Prophet joins the wheels to the angels, as if he would assert that no changes occur by chance, but depend upon some agency, viz., that of angels; not that they move things by their inherent power, but because they are, as we have said, God's hands. And because these changes are really contortions, the Prophet says, *I saw wheel within wheel*; for the course of things is not continuous, but when God begins to do anything, he seems, as we shall again perceive, to recede: then many things mutually concur, whence the Stoics fancied that fate arose from what they called a connection of causes. But God here teaches his people far otherwise, viz., that the changes of the world are so connected together, that all motion depends upon the angels, whom he guides according to his will. Hence the wheels are said to be full of eyes. I think that God opposed this form of the wheels to the foolish opinion of men, because men fancy Fortune blind, and that all things roll on in a kind of turbulent confusion. God, then, when he compares the changes which happen in the world to wheels, calls them "full of eyes," to show that nothing is done with rashness or through the blind impulse of fortune. This imagination surely arises from our blindness: we are blind in the midst of light, and therefore when God works, we think that he turns all things upside down; and because we dare not utter such gross blasphemy against him, we say that Fortune acts without consideration, but in the meantime we transfer the empire of God to Fortune itself. Seneca tells a story of a jester belonging to his wife's father, who, when he lost the use of his eyes through old age, exclaimed that he had done nothing to deserve being cast into darkness — for he thought that the sun no longer gave light to the world; but the blindness was in himself. This is our condition: we are blind, as I have already said, and yet we wish to throw the cause of our blindness upon God himself; and because we do not dare openly to bring a charge against him, we impose upon him the name of fortune; and for this reason the Prophet says the wheels have eyes.

We now understand the scope of the vision, and we must next approach its several parts. After he has said, *a wind sprung up from the north*, and *a great cloud*, he adds, *there was also a fire folding round itself*. Moses, in the ninth chapter of Exodus, (Exodus 9:24,) uses the same word when he speaks of the storm which he caused in Egypt. *There was fire en-folded or entwined*, and *the splendor of fire*. Some shrewdly expound this splendor of the fire, as if God's judgments were not obscure, but exposed to the eyes of all. I cannot agree in this meaning, nor do I think it correct. Here the majesty of God is described to us according to the usual scriptural method. He says, *the fire was splendid in its circuit*, and then *there was as it were the appearance of "Hasmal" in the midst of the fire*. Many think Hasreal to be an angel or an unknown phantom, but, in my opinion, without reason, for Hasmal seems to me a color. Jerome, following the Greek, uses the word *electrum*, but surprises me by saying that it is more precious than gold or silver; for electrum is composed of gold, with a fifth part of it silver, hence, as it does not; exceed them both in value,

Jerome was mistaken. But whether it was electrum or any remarkable color, it so clearly portrayed to the Prophet the majesty of God, that he ought to be wrapt in admiration, although the vision was not offered for his sake personally, but, as I have said before, for the Church at large. The color differed from that of fire, that the Prophet might understand that the fire was heavenly, and, as a symbol of God's glory, had a form unlike that of common fire. Now follows:

Ezekiel 1:5

5. Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* animalium, et hic aspectus eorum, similitudo their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. hominis ipsis.

I have already explained why God showed four angels to his Prophet under the form of four animals. It was necessary to turn a little aside from the sanctuary, since the whole legal worship was obnoxious to the profane. God therefore descends, as it were, from heaven, and appears familiarly on earth, as if he would say that he reigned not only above among his angels, but that he exercised his power here, because angels are engaged on earth, and are connected with all regions of the globe; and the conclusion is, that God's providence is everywhere diffused. He says, *these animals have the likeness of a man*, which does not seem in accordance with the rest of the context. He will immediately say that each animal had four heads, then that their feet were round or like those of a calf, as some interpret it: but here he says they have the form of a man, and the solution is, that the first feet are like those of a man, although in some respects different; nor is it doubtful that cherubim were beheld by the Prophet as angels of God. Wings also do not suit human nature, but he means, that they had *the* usual human stature: although they are not entirely like human beings, yet there is much likeness in their general appearance: and now we understand why it is said that *the likeness was human*

Ezekiel 1:6

6. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. **6.** Et quatuor facies cuique, et quatuor alae cuique ex ipsis.

He now comes to the heads and wings themselves. Many suppose that each animal had four heads, and then that four appearances belonged to each head; others extend the wings much further, because they assign four wings to each of the four heads, and others even sixteen; but this does not seem in accordance with the Prophet's words. He simply says *each had four heads*, and then *four wings*. The wings and the heads correspond; but one animal was endowed with only four heads, and so I do not think that it had more than four wings, which will again be evident from the context. He adds afterwards —

Ezekiel 1:7

7. And their feet *were* straight feet; and the sole of their feet *was* like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. 7. Et pedes eorum pes rectus, et planta pedis eorum tanquam planta pedis vituli: ²⁶ et scintillas jaciebant, ²⁷ tanquam aspectus chalybis politi.

This seems added by way of explanation. Since Ezekiel has spoken of their human form, he adds that *their feet were straight*, although he calls them round or like those of a calf. I refer the straightness not to the feet only but also to the legs. It is therefore just as if he had said that these animals stood as men do. For we differ from the brutes, who look down towards the ground. As the poet appositely remarks, when he commends the singular favor which God has conferred upon man,

*Man looks aloft, and with erected eyes
Beholds his own hereditary skies.* ²⁸

The Prophet now signifies the same thing, when he says that *the animals had straight feet*. He asserts that they had not anything akin to brutes, but rather to the appearance or likeness of man. He says that *their feet were round*, and this seems to indicate their agility or the variety of their movements, as if he had said that their feet were not confined, to any one direction, but wherever God impels them they move easily, since their feet are round. If any of us wishes to turn either to the right or the left, he will feel himself to be contending with nature, if he attempt at the same time to walk backwards; if however his feet were round, or of the form of calves' feet, he could easily move in any direction. Agility of this kind then seems pointed at in the animals. As to *the sparks which shone like polished brass or steel*, we know that this similitude often occurs in Scripture, for whenever God wishes to render his servants attentive, he proposes new figures which may excite their admiration. This very thing happened to our Prophet, because if the usual fleshy color had appeared in these animals, this perhaps would have been neglected: even the Prophet had not considered the meaning of the vision with sufficient attention. But when he saw the glistening thighs and sparks shining in every direction, as if from polished steel, then he was compelled to apply his mind more attentively to this vision. Now, therefore, we see why he says that the appearance of the legs was *like polished steel*, and that sparks *glittered on them*

Ezekiel 1:8

8. And *they had* the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. 8. Et manus hominis sub alis *de sub alis* super quatuor latera *vel angulos*, et facies et alae ipsius quatuor.

²⁶ I conjecture that the points have been changed in this place, because signifies *round*, and here is put, which is a *calf*. I know no reason why the Prophet should say calves' feet or like a calf: this seems rather strange, but I do not contend about trifles. — Calvin.

²⁷ Others. translate, "and sparks" — Calvin.

²⁸ *Os homini sublime, etc.* — Ovid *Metam.* 1 Dryden.

Now the Prophet says: *hands were under their wings* Since hands are the principal instruments of action, we know that all actions are often denoted by this word: whence hands, either pure or defiled, signify the works of men either clean or unclean. When the Prophet says that the animals were endowed with hands, he signifies that they were ready for the performance of any duty enjoined upon them: for he who is without hands lies useless, and cannot execute any work. Therefore that the Prophet may express angelic vigor, he says that they had hands. This also refers to their human figure, but hands denote something peculiar: namely, that they have such agility that they can execute every commandment of God. For he says: *they were under their wings*, by which words he signifies, that the angels have no motions in themselves, so that they cannot be carried where they please, except they are divinely impelled, and their every action guided by the will of God. For without doubt by wings, as in this place so in others, we must understand something more than human, Since therefore the wings, with which the animals are clothed, signify nothing else but the secret instinct of God, it follows, that *hands hidden under the wings* denote nothing else than that angels do not move, as we say, intrinsically, but are impelled from without, namely, by the power of God himself: hence they are not carried about rashly hither and thither, but all their actions are governed by God, since he bends and directs them whithersoever he pleases. This is the reason why the Prophet says that he saw *hands on the animals*, and then *that those hands were under their wings* He repeats again, *they had faces, and four wings to them* The use of the phrase *four sides* is worthy of notice, just as if he had said that the animals have the power of acting equally in all directions, not that they had four hands each, although at first sight this may appear to be the meaning of the words *on four sides*, or in each corner, but it simply means that the hands so appeared on the animals, that they were ready for action whensoever God wishes to impel these animals. Now follows —

Ezekiel 1:9

9. Their wings *were* joined one to another; 9. Societae erant quaeque ad aliam alarum: ²⁹ they turned not when they went; they went every ipsorum *animalium* non revertebantur in one straight forward. gradiendo: ³⁰ vir, ³¹ versus faciem suam ex opposite ³² incedebant.

He says *the wings were conjoined*, which he soon more clearly explains: for he will say that the wings were joined together, and that two were so extended that they clothed or ruled the whole body: but here he touches shortly upon what he will soon treat more at length. Their wings then were so joined together that one touched the other: and afterwards he adds, *they so went forward that they did not return*; and he seems to contradict himself when he afterwards says the animals ran like lightning and then returned: but these two things are not inconsistent, for he will soon add

²⁹ That is, each wing was connected with the next wing. — Calvin.

³⁰ That is, when they moved, they did not turn back. — Calvin

³¹ Or each, — that is, each animal. — Calvin.

³² Literally, in the direction of its face. — Calvin.

the explanation: namely, that the animals so go forward that they proceed in a perpetual course towards their own end or goal, but it does not follow that they afterwards rest there. Therefore when the animals proceed, they do not turn aside in either one direction or another, nor do they turn back, but go straight on in their destined course afterwards, like lightning, yet they have different meetings: and what this means we have no time to explain now, but must defer it till tomorrow.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, since by our dullness we are so fixed down to earth that, when thou stretchest forth thine hand to us, we cannot reach forth to thee, grant, that being roused up by thy Spirit, we may learn to raise our affections to thee, and to strive against our sluggishness, until by a nearer approach thou mayest become so familiarly known to us, that at length we may arrive at the fruition of full and perfect glory laid up for us in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LECTURE THIRD

We must now see why the Prophet says, *each animal walked onwards, or in the direction of his face*. I simply interpret it in a straight course, so that they neither wandered nor declined to either the right hand or the left. For those who turn the face on one side or the other, often stumble, and thus decline from the right way: there was therefore such attention in the animals, that they always kept their object in view, and never bent from their fixed purpose. Hence we see that a fixed, and, as we say, inflexible rule in divine actions is here commended. Men often change their places, and fluctuate, and when they have any purpose, if a different thought strike them, they are carried back again, as if they had forgotten themselves. But God wishes to show that his actions are so arranged, that they have nothing in them either crooked or erroneous. For we have said that angels are represented by these living creatures; and under the image of angels the government of the whole world is signified, because it must be held, that they are, as it were, the hands of God, since he used them in obedience to his will.

Ezekiel 1:10

10. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

10. Et similitudo facierum facies hominis, et facies leonis ad dextram ipsis quatuor: facies autem aequae a sinistra ipsis quatuor, et facies aquiae ipsius quatuor.

He now comes down to the faces or countenances of the living creatures themselves. The face is properly used with reference to the whole body, but the Prophet only means the countenance. He says therefore that *there was on the right as it were the face of a man and of a lion, and on the*

left, the face of an ox and of an eagle We explained yesterday why four heads and as many faces are ascribed to the angels of God, because so great was the dullness of the people, that they did not acknowledge the providence of God over all parts of the world. For we know that they were so intoxicated with foolish confidence, that they wished to hold God shut up as it were within a prison: for their temple was as it were God's prison. Hence the Prophet shows how the providence of God shines over other parts of the world. But since there is vigor in animals, so for brevity's sake he puts four remarkable species of animals. Yet one question remains, and that a difficult one, for in Ezekiel 10:14, he puts a cherub for an ox. Some think, or at least reply, that it appeared at a distance the face of an ox, but nearer it was that of a cherub. All see that this is a sophistry, and because they cannot otherwise escape the difficulty, they have imagined that fiction, which has no firmness in it. Others think that cherub and ox are identical; but this may be refuted from many places, for cherubim have not the heads of oxen, as all very well know. I therefore have no doubt there was some difference in the second vision, when God appeared to his own Prophet in the Temple. It is called the same vision on account of the likeness, but it does not follow that all particulars were exactly the same. Nor ought this conjecture to be rejected, because when God made himself known to his servant in Chaldea, as I have said before, he wished to reprove the sloth of the people by this multiform image; but when he appeared a second time in the Temple, there it was something more divine. Hence therefore the variety, because each animal then bore the *face* of a cherub instead of that of an ox. Therefore, besides the stature of the whole body, there was a remarkable feature whence the Prophet could more easily and familiarly recognize these living-creatures to be cherubim or angels. This reason also seems to explain why God showed to his Prophet a form which approached more nearly to that of the sanctuary, and to the two cherubim who surrounded the ark. Besides, some think that the heads were so arranged, that the man's head should look towards the east, and the opposite head towards the west. But it is scarcely to be doubted that the four faces had the same aspect, and turned their eyes in the same direction, there being on the right the two forms which we have mentioned of a man and a lion, and on the left, those of an ox and an eagle. Afterwards follows —

Ezekiel 1:11

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| <p>11. Thus <i>were</i> their faces: and their wings 11. Et facies eorum ³³ <i>animalium</i>; et alae <i>were</i> stretched upward; two <i>wings</i> of every one eorum <i>extensae vel divisae</i> erant ab excelso, <i>were</i> joined one to another, and two covered their <i>euique</i> ³⁴ <i>colligatae ad socium</i>, et duabus tegebant bodies.</p> | <p>corpore.</p> |
|--|-----------------|

He says, that *the faces as well as the wings were extended*, because the four faces proceeded from one body. Here then the Prophet says, that they are not united together, so that a fourfold form could be seen on one head: there was the form of a man, and then that of a lion, as in one glass

³³ Some stop here, and take the words, "but their wings were extended," disjunctively: but because the copula is used in each place, perhaps we had better unite the clauses in the same context, thus, "Their faces therefore and their wings were extended." — *Calvin*.

³⁴ Now he speaks of the wings themselves. — *Calvin*

various forms sometimes appear, but each answers to its own original. So also the reader might mistake here, as if different faces belonged to the same head: hence the Prophet says, *they were stretched forth or divided from above*. Here he points out a diversity of heads, and as to the wings, he says they were extended, and, at the same time, shows the manner, viz., two joined or bound together, so that each animal was bound to its neighbor. The four living creatures were united by their wings: this the Prophet means; and as to the other wings, he says that they covered their bodies, and so we see some likeness between this vision and that vouchsafed to Isaiah, which he relates in his chap. 6. The reason why the rings were joined together *upwards* is sufficiently clear; because God has such different motions, and so agitates the earth, that the things which seem to be conflicting are most in unison. *The joining*, then, *was upwards*, that is, with respect to God himself, because on earth there often appears dreadful confusion, and the works of God, as far as we can understand them, appear mutually discordant: but whoever raises his eyes to heaven will see the greatest harmony between those things which have the appearance of opposition below — that is, as long as we remain upon earth, and in the present state of the world.

Ezekiel 1:12

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| <p>12. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; <i>and</i> they turned not when they went.</p> | <p>12. Et unum quodque ad <i>contra</i> faciem suam ambulabat; secundum quod erat illuc spiritus ad ambulandum, ³⁵ ambulabant, non revertebantur ambulando.</p> |
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Here the Prophet repeats, that the movement of the living creatures was in each case directed *towards, or in the direction of its face*: and he will say the same again: nor is this repetition superfluous, since, as we said yesterday and must repeat again, mankind can scarcely be induced to ascribe glory to the wisdom of God. For we are so stupid, that we think that God mingles all things inconsiderately, as if he were in the dark. Since, therefore, the actions of God appear to us distorted, it is needful to repeat this clause, viz., *that angels proceed straight forward*, that is, are constrained to obedience. For the son who wishes to imitate his father, and the servant his master, is often agitated and at a loss what to do. Since then, something always appears confused in *creatures*, the Prophet diligently enforces that *angels proceed in the direction of their face*, that is, they tend at once to their goal, and decline neither to one side or the other. What he announces with regard to angels, ought to be referred to God himself; because his intention was not to extol angelic wisdom, but he sets them before us as God's ministers, that we may perceive here one of the fundamental principles of our faith, viz., that God so regulates his actions, that nothing is with him either distorted or uncontrolled.

He adds, *wheresoever there was spirit for proceeding, they proceeded* ³⁶ Spirit is here used in the sense of mind or will: we know that it is often put metaphorically for wind, and also for the

³⁵ That is, as far as the spirit led them for walking. — Calvin.

³⁶ This rendering seems most in accordance with Calvin's Interpretation, and is evidently better than Newcome's, "whithersoever the Spirit was to go, they went." The French reads, "selon que l'esprit estoit pour cheminer, ils cheminoient." — Ed.

human soul, but here the will ought to be understood, and so the Prophet alludes to that very motion by which angels are borne along when God uses their assistance. Since, therefore, the vigor and swiftness of angels is so great that they fly like the wind, the Prophet seems to allude to this likeness. And what David says in the 104th Psalm, “God makes the winds his ministers,” the Apostle, in the first chapter of the Hebrews, aptly applies to the angels themselves. This analogy then, will stand very well, viz., that the angels proceeded wherever their will bore them; and yet by this word the Prophet points out that secret motion by which God bends his angels as he pleases. In the meantime, he confirms what we have lately seen, that angels are not rashly driven in every direction, but have a definite end, because God, who is the fountain of all wisdom, works through their means. He says again, *they so proceed as not to return*, that is, that they do not deviate from their course, for he afterwards says, *they do turn backwards*. But it is easy to reconcile these statements, because it only signifies that their course was not abrupt. While, therefore, they are proceeding in one direction, they go forward until they finish their allotted space, and then they return like lightning. For God does not so fit his angels for one single work, and that they should rest ever afterwards, but daily, nay, every moment, he exercises them in obedience. Since, then, the angels are continually occupied, it is not wonderful that the Prophet says, that *they go and return, and yet not return*, which is explained by their not receding until they have discharged their duty. Lastly, this vision has no other meaning than to inform the Prophet that God does not desert his works in the middle of their course, as he says in Psalm 138:8. Since, therefore, in the works of God, there is nothing unfinished or mutilated, the angels go forward, and finish their allotted space till the goal: they afterwards return like lightning, as he will shortly say. It follows: —

Ezekiel 1:13

13. As for the likeness of the living creatures, **13.** Et similitudo animalium aspectus eorum their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, tanquam carbonēs ignis ardentis, tanquam *and* like the appearance of lamps: it went up and aspectus lampadum discurrens inter animalia, et down among the living creatures; and the fire splendor igni, et ex igne egrediebatur fulgur. was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

As I said yesterday, something divine ought to shine forth in this vision, because God set forth the face of a man and of an ox, of an eagle and of a lion, and in this he accommodates himself to the stupidity of the people, as I have said, and also to the capacity of the Prophet, because, as we are men, we cannot penetrate beyond the sky. God therefore bore in mind his Prophet, and all the pious, while, at the same time, he wished indirectly to reprove the people's sluggishness. At the same time, if the face of a man had not been different from common forms, the vision had not excited such admiration in the mind of the Prophet. Hence something heavenly ought to be mixed with the earthly figures. This is the reason why the living creatures were *like burning fire*. Now we begin to understand what this difference means; as when God appeared to Moses, if there had been nothing wonderful in it, Moses would not have thought that he was called by God, but he acknowledged God in the bush, because he saw that the bush was on fire and yet not consumed.

(Exodus 3:2, 3.) Then he began to be aroused, and to reflect within himself, that a divine vision was presented to him. The same is to be diligently observed in this place. And hence we gather, how humanely, nay, how indulgently, God deals with us. For, as on his part, he sees how small is our comprehension, so he descends to us: hence the faces of the living creatures, the stature of their body, and what we have formerly mentioned. Now, however, since he sees us torpid upon the ground, and lying there, as it were idle, so he raises us up: this is the meaning of what Ezekiel now says, viz., *the appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals*. And since coals taken out of the fire sometimes die out, he says the coals were burning. The Prophet would of necessity be moved when he saw that the living creatures were not really such, that is, when he saw in the form of the animals something celestial, and exceeding the standard of nature, and even the senses of man: and this also is profitable to the rest of man-kind. For when we read this vision we acknowledge what the Prophet narrates to be so evident, that God shines forth in it, and does not suffer his Prophet to doubt. Hence his teaching, which is marked by such certain proofs, is better confirmed to us. In the meantime, it is desirable to impress upon the memory what we said yesterday, that there is something terrific in this vision, since the people were hardened against all threats, nay, even blows themselves. For God had already inflicted severe judgments, not only on the kingdom of Israel, but on the city itself, and the whole land of Judah. Even the captives were champing their bits and roaring, because driven into exile, and, in the meantime, those who remained in the city thought that they were treated nobly. Wherefore such was their security, that it was necessary to put terrors before them, as we shall see a little while afterwards. And it is also said, *the fire burned before God*, where he not only wishes his own glory to be beheld by us, but where he wishes to strike fear, as he did at the promulgation of the law. (Exodus 19:20) And David, in the 18th Psalm, narrates that God appeared to him in this way when he was preserved by him: (Psalm 18:8-15:) doubtless he understands that God unfolded his formidable power against the unbelieving. So also in this place, he says, *the appearance of the living creatures was like fiery and burning coals*, and then he adds another image, that *they were like lamps*, which some explain as firebrands or burnt wood. But another opinion is more general, and more approved by me. The Prophet now expresses the form of the fire more dearly, viz., *that the coals were like lamps*. For lamps send out their brightness to a distance, and seem to scatter their rays in every direction, like the sun when it shines through the serene air. On the whole, the Prophet means, that the fire was not obscure but full of sparks, and shows that rays were diffused like lighted lamps. Afterwards he says, *they walked between the living creatures*. The Prophet sees, as it were, a fiery form amidst the living creatures themselves. Thus God wished to show the vigor of his own spirit in all actions, that we should not measure it in our manner, according to the depravity which is innate with us. For when we discourse concerning the works of God, we conceive what our reason comprehends, and we wish in some way to affix in our minds an image of God. But God shows, that when he works there is a wonderful vigor, as if fire were moving to and fro. Hence that vigor is incomprehensible to us.

Afterwards he says, *The fire was bright, and lightning issued from it*. This would affect the Prophet's mind, when he saw fire glittering in an unaccustomed manner. We know that fire is often bright, especially when flame is added; but the Prophet here intends something very uncommon, as if he had said that the fire is not like that arising from lighted wood, but that it was resplendent, whence we may readily collect that God here sets before us his visible glory: and for the same reason he says, *lightning issued from the fire*. Hence arises the splendor just mentioned, since

lightning is mingled with the fire. But we know that lightning cannot be beheld without fear; for in a moment the air seems inflamed, just as if God would in some way or other absorb the world: hence the appearance of lightning is always terrible to us. He was unwilling, indeed, that his Prophet should be frightened, except as far as was needful to humble him. But, as I stated at the beginning, this vision was not offered to the Prophet for his private use, but that it might be useful to the whole people. Meanwhile the Prophet, as he was but human, had need of this preparation, that he might be humbled. For we always attribute something to pride, which renders our senses obtuse, so as to be incapable of the glory of God. Therefore when God wishes to become familiarly known to us, he strips us of all pride and all security: lastly, humility is the beginning of true intelligence. Now we understand why *lightning issued from the fire*: he afterwards confirms this.

Ezekiel 1:14

14. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. **14.** Et animalia currebant, et revertebantur instar fulguris.³⁷

Here the Prophet explains more clearly what would otherwise be obscure. He says that *the living creatures ran, and returned like lightning*: by which words he doubtless signifies their amazing swiftness. For lightning (as Christ uses that comparison when he speaks of his own Advent — Matthew 24:27) goes forth from one part of the world and penetrates instantly to the opposite. Since, then, the swiftness of lightning is so great that it reaches in a moment through the immensity of heaven, for this reason the Prophet says, *the living creatures ran, and returned like lightning*: as if he had said, in whatever direction God wishes to impel them, they were ready to obey; as we have formerly said, angels are at hand to obey the commands of God: but we cannot comprehend the extreme swiftness of their course, unless by this comparison of lightning. Now we see how well these two things agree, that they did return and yet did not: they did not return until they had arrived, as I have already said, at the goal, because, although many hindrances occur, yet God breaks through them, so that they never interrupt his actions. The devil, indeed, by his obstacles, endeavors to compel God to recede; but here the Prophet shows that when God determines anything, the angels are ready to govern the world, and that they have so much vigor in them, that they go on constantly to the end, as far as God inspires them with his own power. Afterwards it follows —

Ezekiel 1:15

15. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living terra prope animalia ad quatuor ad faciem creaturas, with his four faces. **15.** Et aspexi animalia,³⁸ ecce rota una in cujusque.

³⁷ He uses another word, but they both (, *bezek*, and , *berek*,) signify the same thing: for they signify lightning and *brilliancy*. — *Calvin*.

³⁸ That is, while I was beholding the living creatures. — *Calvin*.

Now the Prophet descends to the wheels which were joined to the living creatures. Each had a double wheel, as we shall see afterwards — that is, one wheel rolling upon another. The Prophet did not notice at one glance that the wheels stood near the living creatures, and this is occasioned by the magnitude of the vision. For although he was attentive, and God doubtless gave him understanding by his Spirit, and although he was taken up, as it were, into heaven, yet inasmuch as he could not at once embrace so great a vision he was convicted of infirmity. Then this wonderful secret was set before him, that he might attend to the whole spectacle with greater reverence. He says, therefore, *when he had fixed his eyes upon the living creatures, immediately the wheels appeared* He uses indeed the singular number, but afterwards declares, there were four wheels. And now he removes all doubt: *behold*, says he, *one wheel* — how one wheel? thus, *near each living creature, at right angles, at the face of each* ³⁹ We see, then, that there was a wheel to each animal: this is easily gathered from the Prophet's words. I explained yesterday what God meant to represent to his servant and to us by these wheels: namely, the changes which constantly occur in the world. For if we consider what the condition of the world is, we may correctly compare it to a sea, and even a tempestuous one. For as the sea is subject to opposite winds, and hence storms are excited, so also since there is nothing firm or calm in the world, its condition is a perpetual change like the turning of a wheel. *The wheels stood near the Angels*, because the world is governed by the secret inspiration of God. When all things seem to roll round by a blind and rash chance, yet God has his servants who regulate all their motions, so that nothing is confused, nothing discomposed. This, then, is the reason why *the wheels went forward and stood near the Angels*, as he immediately repeats again. Now follows —

Ezekiel 1:16

16. The appearance of the wheels and their work *was* like unto the colour of a beryl: and they had one likeness: *trode* their appearance and their work *was* as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

16. Aspectus rotarum et opus ⁴⁰ stent aspectus Tharsis et strutlitudo unius ad quatuor, ⁴¹ et aspectus eorum, et forma ⁴² quemadmodum si rota esset in medio rotae.

Now the Prophet uses the plural number, and says, there were four wheels. He says, the color was like a precious stone. Jerome translates it “*sea*,” because the sea which looks towards Cilicia with respect to Judea is called Tharsis. But I know not why the color of the sea or the sky took his fancy. But granting that, the word is not found simply for a bluish-green color, for tharsis is a precious stone, as we learn from Exodus, Exodus 28:20, and many other places. The Greeks

³⁹ Latin, *ad quatuor adfaciem cujusque*, by which Calvin seems to mean that each wheel intersected another at right angles, the four spherical parts thus becoming four faces or sides. The French translation has in the text *aux quatre*, and in the comments *a quatre a la face d' un chacun*

⁴⁰ That is, workmanship or form — Calvin.

⁴¹ That is, there was a certain equable proportion between the four wheels, so that one was altogether like another — Calvin.

⁴² Either their work or workmanship; — On leur ouvrage ou leur facon. — Calvin.

translated it chrysolite, but I know not whether correctly, nor does it much matter. We need only hold it to be a precious stone, whose color was so exquisite that it attracted all eyes to itself. And so God wished, under the figure of wheels, to place before his Prophet something earthly; but, at the same time, to raise his mind by its color, because he would ascertain from this that they were not either common wheels, or wooden, or of any earthly material, but heavenly ones. The color, then, was intended to draw off the Prophet's mind, so that he might ascertain that heavenly secrets were laid open to him.

Like the appearance of a precious stone, he says: afterwards, *and they four had one likeness*. This may, indeed, be referred to the living creatures as some have conjectured, but I have no doubt that the Prophet here teaches, that the wheels were so equal that there was no difference between them. Therefore their proportion and equality shows that in all God's work there is the greatest arrangement — not that this lies on the surface, (for we should rather think that all things are involved in hurried confusion,) but if we raise our senses above the world, it will doubtless be given us to acknowledge what the Prophet here describes, viz.: that in all God's works the arrangement is so complete that no line could be better directed. God therefore, whilst he turns round the world, preserves an even course with *respect* to himself, so that what we call changes or revolutions have no inequality with respect to himself, but each is in harmony with all the others. At length he adds, *their aspect and workmanship, or form, was as if each wheel were in the midst of a wheel*, so that the bending of one wheel is across that of another. For he does not mean to say, that one wheel was greater and another less, but that two wheels were so united that they were at right angles to each other. Now, we may see why the wheels were double; I touched on it briefly yesterday — viz., because God does not seem to hold on a direct course, but to have various changes, and, as it were, in contrary directions, as if the motion by which each creature is inspired with vigor was drawn in different ways. Therefore it is said, *one wheel was in the middle, of another*. Finally, here God represents to us to the life what experience teaches. For first, the world is carried, along just as the wheels run round, and that, too, not simply but with such great variety that God seems to send forth his impelling force, now to the right hand and now to the left. This, then, is as if two wheels were entangled together. But I cannot proceed further now, and must leave the rest till to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, O Almighty God, since thou wishest us to be subject to so many changes, that we cannot settle on earth with quiet minds — grant, I pray thee, that, being subject to so varying a condition, we may seek our rest in heaven, and always aspire to behold thy glory, so that what our eyes cannot discern may shine upon us from thence; and may we so acknowledge thy hand and power in the government of the whole world, that we may repose upon thy paternal care till we arrive at the enjoyment of that happy rest Which has been acquired for us by the blood of thine only begotten Son. — Amen.

LECTURE FOURTH

Ezekiel 1:17

17. When they went, they went upon their four sides: *and* they turned not when they went. **17.** Ad quatuor latera sua, ambulando ibant, non revertabantur cum ambularent.

What he had already explained he now repeats for the sake of confirmation, *that they went upon their four sides* — that is, each living creature proceeded straight forward; the words *they turned not* refer to their perseverance; not that they exceeded the appointed space, but because they went forward to their object without intermission. I touch but lightly now on what has been already sufficiently explained.

Ezekiel 1:18

18. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings *were* full of eyes round about them four. **18.** Et circumferentiae ipsis, ⁴³ it proceritas ipsis, et terga ipsarum ⁴⁴ plena oculis per circuitum ipsis quatuor.

What he says about the circumferences of the wheels may seem superfluous, but he refers to the second clause of the verse, where he says, that these circumferences were full of eyes. Here, then, he now treats about their height and terrible aspect. It signifies that the wheels were large, for being round their length and breadth is equal. When he says *they were lofty*, he, doubtless, signifies that they inspire terror by their very appearance, as he afterwards expresses it.. The sum of the whole is, that these wheels were not common ones, but, they so exceeded the usual size that their magnitude was formidable. But all these things tend to impress the vision on the attention of the Prophet, because unless the Lord should, as it were, draw us violently to himself, we should become torpid through sloth. The Prophet then required to be so variously affected, that, as soon as he sees that no common vision is before him, he should apply all his faculties to its consideration. What he now says, *that the circumferences of the wheels were full of eyes*, signifies that all the wheels were not rashly but considerately put in motion. If the eyes had been in other parts, they had not been useful; but since the wheels turned by means of their felloes — that is, their iron hoops — there the Prophet saw the eyes fixed.

Now, therefore, we see in what manner God directs the world in various ways, and yet nothing is done without reason and plan. By *the eyes*, the Prophet understands, that providence which never wanders. He does not say, that every wheel had two eyes, but *that the circumferences were full of eyes*, which expresses much more than if he had said they possessed eyes: which means that there was not the least motion in the wheels unless arranged and governed with the utmost reason. And hence the error of those who think that years are intended by the entangled wheels is refuted. This idea they obtained, I suppose, from the Egyptians, for in their hieroglyphics the year is represented under the image of a serpent., which, being twisted round, bites his own tail. It is indeed true, that

⁴³ Properly backs, but he means circumferences or felloes, iron hoops. — Calvin.

⁴⁴ That is, circumferences or strakes; their strakes were full of eyes. — Calvin.

the continual series of time is so woven together that year draws year behind it, *as Virgil* also says in his second Georgic —

“The year returns into itself by its own footsteps.”

But this is altogether out of place here, where the Prophet; signifies that motions which seem to us confused are yet connected, because God does nothing either rashly or inconsiderately. Now, therefore, we comprehend the sense of this portion. He adds —

Ezekiel 1:19

19. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. **19.** Et cum incederent animalia, incedebant rotae prope illa; et cum attollerentur animalia e terra, simul elevantur rotae.

By this verse the Prophet teaches, that all the changes of the world depend on celestial motion. For we have said that the living creatures represent to us Angels whom God inspires with a secret virtue, so that he works by means of their hands. Now, therefore, when he says, that the wheels proceeded through a higher movement than their own, it follows that nothing happens by chance in the world, but that God, by his own incomprehensible wisdom, so directs all things that nothing happens except by that secret instinct which is imperceptible to us. Therefore in this teaching of the Prophet, as in a glass, we ought to consider what is concealed from human comprehension. We see many things happen, and in the meantime we think the motions, which are so perplexed and multiplied, confused; but the Prophet meets this perverse imagination, and teaches that the wheels rest by themselves and are set in motion by a higher force — that is, as the living creatures or cherubim are moved, so the wheels are drawn along by their influence. Now, therefore, because we perceive the meaning of the Holy Spirit, so the usefulness of the doctrine is to be noticed. When we see men planning’ so many things that they disturb the whole world, when we see many conspiracies made, and then all things necessary for action prepared, let us perceive that God governs all things, but in a secret manner which surpasses our senses. Also, when we see many things happen as we think unseasonably, let us think that Angels are discharging their duty, and that by their motion and inspiration things in themselves motionless are borne along. The same may be said of other things: winter, for example, may be too mild or too rough; in that excess, let us consider what the Prophet teaches here, viz.: that God so governs the order of the seasons, that nothing happens unless by his inspiration. When, therefore, *the living creatures went forward, the wheels near them also wear forward*, he says, meaning that the living creatures were the rule by which the wheels directed their course, and *when they were raised*, he adds, *the wheels were raised also*

Ezekiel 1:20

20. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither *was their* spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature *was* in the wheels. **20.** Quo erat spiritus ad curtdum ambulabant, illuc spiritus ad eundum; etiam rotae attollebantur cum ipsis; quia spiritus animalis erat in rotis.

Thus I arrange the clauses, for though others join the first; clause with the second part of the verse, it is too forced. Therefore the Prophet repeats what he had said, though he is rather prolix. Afterwards he adds, *that the wheels were raised*, taking the word generally for elevated, but not exactly as in the last and next verse. I now add the next verse —

Ezekiel 1:21

21. When those went, *these* went; and when those stood, *these* stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature *was* in the wheels. **21.** Ambulando ambulebant: ⁴⁵ et cum starent stabant: et cum elevarentur, ⁴⁶ attollebantur rotae simul cum ipsis; quia spiritus animalis in rotis.

He continues the same sentence, that the wheels were fixed, not that they fell but stood without motion, which we know to be unnatural, for a wheel cannot stand on any part of its rim, but will either fall on one side or the other, or will roll on: for the Prophet says that the wheels were immovable. Whence it follows that their moving force was external to themselves. Afterwards he confirms the same by additional words. *For as the living creatures and the wheels stood together, so they moved and were elevated together.* Here the Prophet enlarges upon what he had just touched upon. For although the matter is obscure, yet this copiousness excites attention, and leads us to understand that the motion of the wheels is not uselessly transferred to the living creatures, and that the cause resides there: because if this had been said briefly, it might have been transmitted carelessly, but since the Prophet so often asserts the motion of the wheels to be derived from the living creatures, hence it follows that all changes of things which are seen in the world have their origin from some external source, as I have formerly said. The reason, too, is repeated — *that the spirit of the living creatures or animals was in the wheels*: for here as before there is an alteration in the number. Though the Prophet understood the spirit of the living creatures to be in the wheels, yet the wheels do not comprehend anything, but receive vigor, as the moon obtains its brightness from the sun. So we perceive that the wheels are impelled, not that the intelligence of the living creatures had been transfused through the wheels. For God does not give mind and judgment to either winter or summer, to either peace or war, to either the calm or the storm, the pestilence or anything else. What then? Neither air, nor earth, nor sea, have any rigor by themselves, unless so far as God by his angels directs the earth to this use, or while he bends the minds of men in one

⁴⁵ i.e. When the living creatures went, the wheels went, and when the one stood the other stood. — Calvin.

⁴⁶ This word, *nesa*, is correctly used for being lifted up from the earth, for he had said “raised” before without any addition. — Calvin.

direction or the other, to either war or peace. Now, therefore, we clearly see the meaning of *the spirit of the living creatures being in the wheels*, viz., that God transfuses his influence through angels, so that not even a sparrow falls to the earth without his foresight, as Christ says, (Matthew 10:29; Luke 12:6.) Therefore, whenever the confusion of our affairs urges us to despair, let us try to remember this sentiment, that the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels. And truly when we tremble in doubtful circumstances, what can we do but acquiesce in this doctrine — viz., that the end of everything will be according to God's decree, because nothing is carried on without his permission, and that there, is no motion, no agitation under the heavens, unless he has inspired it by his angels. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 1:22

22. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature *was* as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. **22.** Et similitudo super capita animalis *hoc est animalium* firmamenti: ⁴⁷ tanquam aspectus chrystalli terribilis; expansi ⁴⁸ super capita ipsorum *animalium* desuper.

Now the Prophet states the principal thing in this vision — that God was seated on his throne: because if he had spoken only of wheels and living creatures, the vision had been partial, and therefore inefficient. But when he places God upon his own throne, we understand that angels, who inspire motion in other things, have neither vigor nor motion peculiar to themselves. On the whole, the Prophet here says that angels so move all things that are done under heaven, that no proper motion ought to be ascribed to them. And why? because God presides over them and governs their actions. This is the object of the latter part of the vision, which we are now going to explain.

He says then, *above the heads of the living creatures was the likeness of a firmament* ⁴⁹ By these words he wishes gradually to draw us to God himself, and God also so deals with his Prophet that he places different steps by which the Prophet himself according to his capacity may gradually climb to an immense altitude. The Prophet does not here speak concerning the throne of God, but only concerning the firmament. For when we raise our eyes upwards, God's glory appears nearer to us than it does on earth. True it is, that it shines equally on all sides; but heaven has in itself: greater excellence than the whole earth, and the nearer we approach to God, the more conspicuous to us becomes his image. For truly God there exercises his own power and wisdom much more clearly than on earth. How many wonders does the sun present to us! If we consider first the planets, and next the stars, we shall be inspired a hundred times with admiration. Therefore when the Prophet speaks of the firmament, he raises our thoughts so that they approach by degrees unto God. *He saw therefore the likeness of the firmament* Had he simply seen the firmament, it would not have been a vision: for this is always visible. I know not why the Greeks used the word στερέωμα, nor why the Latins followed them: for the Hebrew word , *rekiang*, has nothing like it or in affinity with

⁴⁷ Expansion, , *rekiang*, is the word used by Moses in the history of *creation*. — Calvin.

⁴⁸ Others translate *ice*. — Calvin.

⁴⁹ Firmament, or extended expansion; the word, , *netvi*, is referred to , *rekiang*. — Calvin.

it. Yet I use the received word. The heavens then, which are always visible, could not render the Prophet sufficiently attentive. But he saw the *likeness of the firmament*, whence he noticed that it was not the mere sky, but a new form submitted to his eyes, as if God were bringing the Prophet himself into heaven with outstretched hand. *Above the heads of the living creatures an expansion was spread out* Here another participle is used, *netvi*, signifying “*extended*,” for the word *neteh*, means to extend or stretch out. *As the appearance of terrible crystal*, he says; for the color of crystal was in this sky which the Prophet saw, but God added the terror, because, as I have previously mentioned, on account of our sluggishness God must put forth violence when he wishes to attach us entirely to himself. *Above the heads of the living creatures themselves, he says, upwards*; that is, that we may understand them to be subject to the sway of Almighty God, as we shall afterwards see. It follows —

Ezekiel 1:23

23. And under the firmament *were* their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and on that side; and every one had two, which covered on that side, and on this side; *in* their bodies.

23. Et sub expansione *vel* firmamen, *to* alto animali duae alae quibus se operiebat, et euque dum quibus *operiebant* se sua cotpora *vel* in corporibus suis.

There is some obscurity in the words, but it may be easily removed if we remark the two ways of covering; for those wings which tended upwards covered the living’ creatures themselves- that is, their faces, but the other wings, which were joined to their bodies, covered the body itself. Some think that there is a repetition here, and say that the two wings which cover the face and those which cover the body are the same. But this seems to me absurd. I have no doubt but that what we saw before is repeated, namely, that each living creature was covered with four wings, comprising the two which were raised upwards, and the two which were so joined that *each* living creature was connected with another. That was one form of covering: but another was by letting the wings fall which covered the whole body. On the whole, the Prophet adds nothing new, but impresses what he had said before. It follows —

Ezekiel 1:24

24. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.

24. Et audiui vocem alarum ipsorum sicuti vocem aquarum magnarum *vel* multarum sicuti vocem Dei,⁵⁰ cum ambularent vocem sermonis sicuti vocem castrorum, *hoc est exercitus*: cum starent remittebant alas suas.

⁵⁰ Or a strong voice, or the voice of a strong one, as some think. — Calvin.

When the Prophet says, *he heard the voice of wings*, it is an explanation of his former teaching, when he said that the wings followed the course of the living creatures, and stood, unless when they were drawn by the living creatures: this he now expresses more clearly by the word *voice*. We know that, precepts are expressed by the voice, and this is the means of human intercourse, so that he who bears sway proclaims by the voice what he wishes to be done. Since therefore what we have previously said was obscure — that the wheels were moved by the living creatures — therefore the Prophet says there was *a voice in the motion of the wings*. He had said this before, and he now repeats that the living creatures sometimes rested and let fall their wings. When the wings were thus let fall there was no motion in the wheels; but as the wheels obey the motions of the living creatures, he says *the wings were vocal*; not that the wheels were endued with ears or could hear any commands. But the Prophet could not otherwise express what I have just said: viz., that heaven and earth are full of angelic motion, unless he said that in such motion there was something like a voice, as he said that whatever happens obeys God's will. But this obedience cannot be conceived unless a voice go before it. Now therefore we see the Prophet weaving his own discourse, and by a new form of speech expressing and confirming what we formerly saw — that the wheels were moved by the living creatures, because in the wings themselves a voice was heard, he adds, *it was as it were a voice many or mighty waters*. We know that a great noise arises from the overflow of art impetuous river. Nothing is more terrible than its sound, for it is something like a crash which seems to threaten the breaking up of the whole earth, and this vehemence the Prophet now expresses. He adds, *a voice of God*. It will be harsh to explain this of God himself, to whom although the phrase is often attributed, yet we know that it is done metaphorically. But there ought to be some external likeness which may show the Prophet what was not visible of itself. But that cannot suit the phrase, "the voice of God," unless we understand it as in Psalm 29:5, 6, 9, concerning thunder: the voice of God shakes the cedars and the mountains, and makes the animals miscarry in the woods. Here David calls thunder the voice of God, but I know not whether this metaphor is suitable to the present place. Nor yet if we could take the word of God in another sense, could it mean anything but thunder. Others translate , *shedi*, brave or violent, which suits tolerably well, unless a general form of speech is not sufficiently fitted to this place. For those images of things ought to be set before the mind of the Prophet that tend to raise it upwards. Besides, if he had said simply the voice of a strong or violent man, it would imply but little, so I dare not reject the meaning — thunder; and if this exposition is unsatisfactory to any one, yet the meaning will still be a loud and terrific voice, because Scripture calls cedars and mountains, cedars and mountains of God, on account of their superior excellence. (Psalm 80:11; Psalm 36:6.)

He says, *when they walked*, because there was no other motion, for he said that the wings of the animals were let fall while they stood. Then it was not necessary for earthly things to be agitated, unless when the inspiration goes forward in the living creatures, that is the angels. He adds, *the voice of speech*. Here Ezekiel proceeds further, asserting the voice to be articulate. True, inanimate things cannot hear a voice, but as I have said, he wished to represent the obedience in the wheels to be such as if they had been taught, and God had eloquently and articulately commanded what he wished to be done; or as if the wheels had spoken intelligibly, so that the wheels might not afterwards roll round rashly, but in accordance with a received command. He says, *as it were the voice of armies*. And the simile is to be diligently noticed, because in an army, in consequence of the multitude, one can scarcely notice another with the view of promoting union, and yet military

discipline requires this.⁵¹ Therefore, in camps there is great clamor and confusion, yet each accommodates himself to others, and so order is preserved. The Prophet therefore signifies, that although infinitely numerous events meet together, yet nothing is left without guidance, because God governs all earthly motions with much better skill than a general, though endued with singular foresight, rules his army. We see therefore what the Spirit intends by this part of the vision, when he compares the things that are carried on in the world to mighty forces; for he says that such reason was displayed among this multitude, that although their clamors are tumultuous, yet all things are mutually suited to each other. Again he says, *when they stood they let down their wings*. This question may be asked, how can the living creatures rest when God is always at work: as also Christ says, *My Father and I work even to this day?* (John 5:17.) Since therefore the power of God is never at rest, what can the resting of the living creatures mean? for God works by angels as we have seen: if they rest, God has his periods of repose, which is absurd. But when the Prophet says *they rested*, he wishes to mark the variety of human events. For sometimes they are so tranquil, that we think God is taking some repose, and is completely at rest in heaven: not that he ever ceases, but because we do not perceive the agitations, which plainly show his virtue to consist in motion and in action. Therefore the Prophet here wishes only to denote variety; not that we ought to imagine God to rest at any time or his angels to repose, but because he does not always work in the same equable manner.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty *God*, that though we have wandered far from thee, we may be taught by thy word, and hold on in the right way of approach to thyself, and by faith contemplate what is otherwise hidden from us, and thus depend entirely on thee. May we so rely on thy providence, as not to doubt our perfect safety while our life and salvation are in thy care, so that while tossed about by various storms we may remain quiet, until at length we enjoy that blessed and eternal rest which thou hast prepared for us in heaven by Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LECTURE FIFTH.

Ezekiel 1:25-26

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| <p>25. And there was a voice from the firmament that <i>was</i> over their heads, when they stood, <i>and</i> had let down their wings.</p> | <p>25. Et fuit vox desuper expansione quae erat super caput eorum; cum ipsa starent remittebant alas suas.</p> |
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⁵¹ The French Translation rather amplifies than accurately renders this sentence.

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| <p>26. And above the firmament that <i>was</i> over their heads <i>was</i> the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the saphiri likeness of the throne <i>was</i> the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.</p> | <p>26. Et super firmamentum ⁵² quae erat super caput eorum tanquam visio, <i>vel aspectus</i> lapidis similitudo solii: et super similitudinem solii similitudo tanquam aspectus hominis super ipsum desuper.</p> |
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Is a former lecture we said, that the Prophet, while magnifying the glory of God, spoke of the firmament, because human minds cannot penetrate to so great a height, unless by degrees. On this account, the Prophet described to us the expansion of the heavens. He now adds, *there was a likeness of a throne above the firmament, and the likeness of a man sat on the throne*. He mentions the steps in order by saying, *above the expansion was the throne, and above the throne a man*. For he repeats what he had formerly said about the expansion of the heavens. And as God consulted his infirmity, so he now accommodates his discourse to the measure of our capacity. It is worthy of observation that he says, *he saw the likeness of an appearance*. Hence we gather, that it was not the true heavens which he beheld, nor was it a throne formed of any material substance, nor was it a real and natural body of a man. This also the Prophet clearly expresses, lest any one should imagine that there is anything visible in God, and, like the fanatics, should suppose him to be corporeal; so from this passage any one might ignorantly collect, that God can be seen by the eye, confined within place and be seated as a man. Lest these imaginings should creep into men's minds, the Prophet here testifies, that it was not a human body nor any material throne which he saw, but that these forms and appearances only were presented to him. Let not any one think that the Prophet is vainly prolix in matters sufficiently clear.

He says, *above the expansion, which was above the head of the living creatures*. We have already explained why he treats of the heads of the living creatures — namely, because the former vision ought all to be referred to God himself. He now adds, *the expansion*, because we cannot ascend from the living creatures to God without some assistance. Hence the firmament is brought before us, so that we may arrive at the loftiness of God by degrees. The phrase, *the likeness of a sapphire stone*, is used to show that figures only were apparent to the Prophet: and this is the meaning of the likeness of a throne. For we know that heretics formerly disturbed the Church by their folly, who thought God to have a human form like ourselves, and also a throne on which he sits. Hence the Holy Spirit, that he may meet such comments, says, that the Prophet did not see a material throne, but only the likeness of one. But this is chiefly needful in mentioning the figure of a man: 'for this and similar passages, having been erroneously explained by those who assigned a human form to the Almighty, have given occasion to the error that God is corporeal and circumscribed within a defined space, and they proceeded to that pitch of fury, that they rushed in troops and wished to stone all those who opposed their impiety. The Prophet, therefore, says here, *that he saw, as it were, the likeness of a human appearance*. One noun ought to suffice, but because we are so prone to vague and erroneous opinions, he joins the word "appearance" to "likeness." We see, then, that whatever the ancient heretics fabricated about the visible form of God is excluded by the clearest language.

⁵² Or rather expansion, as we have said. — Calvin.

It is now asked, Why God put on the form of a man in this vision as well as in other similar ones? I willingly embrace the opinion of those fathers who say that this is the prelude to that mystery which was afterwards displayed to the world, and which Paul magnificently extols when he exclaims

— “Great is this mystery — God is manifest in the flesh.”

(1 Timothy 3:16.)

The view of Jerome is harsh, who applies these words to the Father himself. For we know that the Father was never clad in human flesh. If he had simply said, that God is here represented, there would have been no absurdity; let all mention of persons be removed, and then it is true enough that the man seated on the throne was God. The Prophet also at the end of the chapter bears witness to this, when he says, this was the likeness of God’s glory, (Ezekiel 1:28:) for he uses the name Jehovah, by which the eternity and primary essence of God is expressed. It is quite tolerable that God should be represented by this figure, but what John says in his chapter 12 (John 12:41,) must be added, that when Isaiah saw God sitting on his throne, he saw the glory of Christ, and spoke concerning him. Hence what I have already cited from the ancients completely agrees with this, that as often as God appeared under the form of man, an obscure glimpse was afforded of the mystery which was at length manifested in the person of Christ. In the meantime we must entirely avoid the dreams of Servetus, who is easily refuted by the words of the Prophet. For he contends that this likeness was really a man, and then that Christ was a figurative Son, because God was visibly composed, as he said, of three uncreated elements.

These are most detestable blasphemies, and unworthy of refutation, yet because that impious blasphemer fascinated many vain persons, who suffered the deserved punishment of their foolish curiosity, it is useful just to touch on their errors in passing. He imagines, then, that Christ was the visible God from the creation of the world, and in this way he interprets him to be the image of God. He does not acknowledge the Father as a person, but says, the Father was the invisible God, but that Christ is both the Father’s image and also a person. He now says, he was composed of three uncreated elements. If he had said of three elements only, Christ had not been God, but he fancies for himself elements called into being which have their origin in the essence of God; these elements, he says, were so disposed as to have the form of man, so that he does not say that Christ appeared only in human form, but he says, that Christ was a man figured in that. divine essence. At length he says, that Christ was made man of the seed of Abraham, because to these three elements a fourth was added, which he allows to be created: so he says Christ was man, because he imagines a mass concocted in some confused manner out of that visible deity and of the seed of Abraham. Christ then, according to him, was man for a time, because that visible deity was mingled with flesh, he next adds, that the flesh of Christ was absorbed by the Deity; and so God was made man not by union but by confusion; and then he says, that the man was deified, and that Christ’s flesh became of the same essence with God: and hence, that he is no longer man. Hence he derides us, who teach that we cannot be partakers of Christ unless we ascend by faith into heaven, because he feigns his body to be everywhere and immense. How can this be? He is deified, says he, and hence retains no trace of human nature. We now see what monstrous things this impostor fabricated. But our Prophet dispels such clouds when he says — *then appeared the likeness of the appearance of a man.*

Daniel describes to us the throne of God more distinctly, who (Daniel 7:9 and following) brings forward The Ancient of Days as wearing- the figure of a man. There God is placed on the highest

summit: next Christ the Mediator is joined to him: and Daniel says he was brought to the Ancient of Days, because as Christ descends from the Father, so he was received into his glory, and now the greatest sway and power has been given to him, as we are there taught at length. But, with reference to this passage, it ought to suffice us, that the Prophet saw God only in the person of Christ, because what is said of the likeness of a man cannot be transferred to either the Father or the Spirit: for neither the Father nor the Spirit was ever manifested in flesh, but God was manifested to us in flesh when Christ appeared, in whom resides the fullness of the Divinity. In Philippians 2:7, Paul says that Christ was made in man's likeness; and that in form and habit he appeared man, but in another sense: for he does not make a figurative Christ, nor does he treat professedly of the essence of Christ's body, but he informs us, that such was his condition when he came down to us. He says, that he was humbled, so that he differed in nothing from the human species: and even the word *μóρφη* is used by Paul, which distinguishes essence from species. Now, therefore, we hold the view of Paul, who says, that Christ was found in fashion as a man, because he was outcast and despised in our flesh. But in this place the Holy Spirit teaches otherwise, viz., that Christ now appeared in the form of man, though not yet made man. If any one should now ask, whence this body was taken, the reply is at hand: the body was not created as to substance, but this form was created for the time. For God, as is well known, sometimes gives his angels bodies, which afterwards vanish away. But there was another reason for this vision, because Christ did not appear in the form of man, that he might taste food as the angels did, (Genesis 19:2, 3) but only that he might accommodate himself to the capacity of the Prophet.

The sum of the whole then is this: the likeness of body was only in appearance, as the Prophet says, but not in essence. Hence we collect, that when mention is made of God the whole essence is understood, which is common to the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father: for under the name Jehovah it is absurd to understand Christ only. It follows, then, that the whole essence of God is here comprehended. At the same time, when the persons are mutually compared, the phrase, "in the form of man," belongs solely to Christ. The whole Deity, then, appeared to his Prophet, and that too in the form of a man, but yet neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit appeared, because the persons begin to be considered when the peculiar property of Christ is shown forth. We are compelled to remark this, because fanatics now spread a new error, as if Christ and the Holy Spirit were distinct Deities from the Father. A certain impostor, named George Blandrata of Piedmont, once came among us under the character of a physician, and concealed his impiety as long as he could, but when he found himself detected he fled to Poland, and infected the whole of that region with his poison. He is unworthy of mention, but because he wished to acquire a name by his blasphemies, he has become, forsooth, as famous as he desired. Since, then, this error is widely circulated, and the whole of Poland is infected with this diabolical delirium, as I have said, those who are less exercised in Scripture ought to fortify themselves lest they fall into those snares. They imagine that Christ is indeed God, but not that God whom Moses and the Prophets celebrate; and although God is often mentioned in the Law and the Prophets, yet they restrict this to the Father alone: they allow, indeed, Christ to be God, but when pressed closer, they say that he is God in essence,⁵³ to whom the Father has communicated his essence, as it were, by transfusion; so, according to these, he is only a fictitious God, because he is not the same God with the Father. They think their impiety is established as often as the Father is simply called God: but the solution is easy, that a comparison

⁵³ "Deum essentiatum. Deus factitius." — *Orig.* "Dieu essentie. Dieu qui a este fait." — *Fr.*

is then made between the Father and the Son. In John 3, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son: true, the Father is here called God, but, on the other hand, the Son is added: so it is not to be wondered at that the original Deity is placed in the highest position. At other times, when there is no comparison between one person and another, then the whole Deity, which is common to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and is one and simple, is denoted. Lastly, when the persons do not come into consideration, there is no relation of one to the other, but when the persons are considered, then the mark of relation between them arises, so that the Father is put first, and then the Son and Holy Spirit, each in its own order.

I shall not collect the universal testimony of Scripture, because it is sufficient just to put the finger on these foul errors, lest any of the unskillful should be caught by such snares. When Paul says, (1 Timothy 3:16,) that God was manifest in the flesh, surely he does not speak of any secondary or adventitious essence. For the essence of God is one: therefore the whole Deity was manifest in the flesh, as also Christ says, I am in the Father and the Father in me; (John 14:10, 11;) and in other places he teaches, that the whole fullness of Deity resides in Christ. Hence we collect, that the essence of God ought not to be torn, as if one part could be with Christ, and another with the Father. So that when John, in his Canonical Epistle, (1 John 5:20,) says, that Christ is truly God: This is the true God, he says, and life eternal — surely the blasphemy will not be tolerated if men should say that the true God is any other than the Father. Concerning whom then can this be predicted, except the only God? If this is transferred from the Father he will cease to be God. If, therefore, Christ is truly God, it follows, that his essence is the same as the Father's. So that when Paul says, that the Church was purchased with the blood of God, (Acts 20:28,) surely the name of God is placed there simply and without addition. When that impostor restricts the name of God to the Father, how will this agree with the opinion of Paul? God, he says, redeemed the Church with his own blood: if this were so, we ought to understand that God of glory who was from eternity and whom Moses and the Prophets celebrate. Now therefore, we understand how Christ appeared as to person in human form, and yet the whole Deity appeared. That Christ appeared can be clearly shown from that twelfth chapter of John which I have quoted. (John 12:41.) That the whole Deity appeared both Isaiah and Ezekiel plainly testify. I saw Jehovah seated on his throne. (Isaiah 6:1.) Who is that Jehovah unless the God of Israel, concerning whom Moses formerly pronounced, Thy God, O Israel, is one God, (Deuteronomy 6:4.) How then does John transfer this to Christ? why, with regard to person. We see then how well all these things harmonize, because the whole Deity appeared in the perfection of his glow, and of his immense essence, and yet appeared in the person of Christ alone, because neither the Father nor the Spirit were ever clothed in human flesh.

I have dwelt a little longer on this doctrine, because there are many who are not versed in the writings of the Fathers, and cannot easily satisfy themselves, and these are knotty points; yet I have endeavored so to clear up a matter which seems obscure and perplexing, as shortly as possible, that any one of moderate capacity and judgment can easily understand what I have said. At the same time, I shall not proceed with what I could skillfully bring forward on the point;. Nothing is more useful in such matters than wisdom tempered with sobriety and discretion. God appeared under a visible form to his servant: could Ezekiel on that account do as scholastic theologians do — philosophize with subtilty concerning God's essence, and know no end or moderation in their dispute! by no means, but he restrained himself within fixed bounds. Paul was caught up even to the third heavens, (2 Corinthians 12:4,) but he says, that he heard unspeakable things which he was not permitted to explain. So, therefore, let us be content with sound doctrine, which can sufficiently

fortify us against all the snares of the devil. For this reason he says, *upon the throne was the likeness as of the appearance of a man upon it.*

Ezekiel 1:27

27. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.

27. Et vidi tanquam formam Hasmal, tanquam aspectum ignis intus per circuitum, ab aspectu lumborum ejus et supra, et ab aspectu lumborum ejus et infra, vidi quasi aspectum ignis et splendor illi in circuitu.

By these words the Prophet signifies that God appeared so visible under the form of man that the splendor dazzled his eyes. For if the appearance of Christ was such that the Prophet could consider each part separately, as when I behold a man, I not only cast my eyes upon his form from head to foot, but I consider of what kind his eyes are, and also his sides, and what his stature is, whether tall or short.

When we look at men or trees, a glance is sufficient for distinguishing their several parts. But if we wish to cast our eyes upon the sun, they are immediately made dim, for the brightness of the sun is so great that it dazzles us. Then if our eyes cannot bear the light of the sun, how can the glance of our mind penetrate even to *God*, and comprehend the whole of his glory? This then is the Prophet's object when he says, *I saw as it were the color of amber*. We have said that some interpreters understand an angel here, but in my judgment, their view is erroneous: hence I reject it, for I have no doubt that color is meant, and what sort of color. As to Jerome's version, *electrum*, I leave it doubtful: as to his saying that it is more precious than gold and silver, this is foolish, because it is composed of both metals. But then its color was remarkable, because it not only attracted the eyes of the Prophet but dazzled them with its splendor, so that he acknowledged it as celestial and divine. Therefore he adds, *there was as it were the appearance of fire within*, which we have previously explained, and that, too, *round about it*. The fire was apparent, so that the Prophet might understand that there were some marks of the glory of God; and at the same time, that he might perceive, as we shall see at last, this vision to be otherwise useless unless he restrained himself within due limits: because when the majesty of God meets us on the way, it can destroy the angels themselves. What therefore would become of us? But God suits himself to our capacities, so that visions should be useful to us only when we avoid pride and are not carried away by foolish and bold curiosity. He says then, *the fire appeared upwards and downwards*, that is above and below his loins, and *the fire was brilliant round about*. Afterwards he adds —

Ezekiel 1:28

28. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so *was* the aspectus arcus, qui est in nube in die phvia ⁵⁴ sic appearance of the brightness round about. This fuit aspectus splendoris in circuitu. Haec visio *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory similitudinis gloriae Iehovm, et aspexi, et cecidi of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my super faciem meam, et audivi vocem loquentis. face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. ⁵⁶

The Prophet now adds, *that the likeness of a celestial bow was presented to him*, which profane men call his, and imagine that she performs the commands of the gods, and especially of Juno. But Scripture calls it the bow of God, not because it was created after the Deluge, as many falsely suppose, but because God wished to stir up our hope with that symbol, as often as thick vapors cloud the heavens. For we seem as if drowned under those waters of the heavens. God therefore wished to meet our distrust, when he wished the bow in the heavens to be a testimony and pledge of his favor, because it is said by Moses, I will put my bow in the heavens. (Genesis 9:13.) Now some distort this as if the bow was not in existence before: but there is no doubt that God wished to inscribe a testimony of his favor on a thing by no means in accordance with it, as he freely uses all creatures according to his will. The bow in the heavens is often a sign of continued rain, and seems as if it attracted the shower. Since then its very aspect may cause terror, God says in opposition to this feeling, as often as the bow appears, it is clearly determined that the earth is now safe from a deluge. But the opinion of those who consider it in this place a testimony of favor does not seem to me proved, for the whole vision is opposed to it. This is indeed plausible that a bow appeared because God now wished to show himself propitious to his servant, just as they interpret that verse in the fourth chapter of Revelations, (Revelation 4:3,) when John saw the throne of God surrounded by a bow, because God was reconciled to the world by Christ. As far as this passage is concerned, I do not dispute it, but to interpret it so here would be altogether out of place, because the whole of this vision was formidable, as I said at the beginning. Thus to mingle contrary things would pervert the whole order of the vision.

What, then, is the object of this bow in the heavens? We have said that heaven appeared to the Prophet as he ascended by degrees to comprehend the glory of God, because the marks of deity are more conspicuous in heaven than on earth. For if we look back upon what we have formerly explained, God is never without witness, as Paul says, (Acts 14:17,) but yet his majesty shines clearer in the heavens. But when the bow appears, a new reason occurs for magnifying the glory of God. For in the bow we have the image of deity more clearly expressed, whilst we reflect on the magnificent workmanship of heaven, and whilst we turn our eyes round to all the stars and planets. In this way, I allow, God compels us to admire his glory, but the bow presents an addition not to be despised, as if God would add something to the bare aspect of heaven. Now therefore we see why the Prophet saw a celestial bow, — that he might be more and more affected when God presented such signal appearances to his view, and that he might be more induced to contemplate his glory. Hence what interpreters bring forward about a symbol of reconciliation is altogether out of place.

⁵⁴ We must repeat the words “*I saw*” from the former verse. — *Calvin*.

⁵⁵ That is, when it rains. — *Calvin*.

⁵⁶ Others translate, a speaking voice. — *Calvin*.

I saw, says he, *the form of a bow which is placed, or which is in the cloud on a rainy day*. If any one should ask if those colors are without substance, it is certain that colors arise from the rays of the sun on a hollow cloud, as philosophers teach. Therefore when the Prophet says, *a bow appears on a rainy day*, he simply means, exists or appears in the midst; not that the colors have any substance, as I have just said, but the rays of the sun, whilst they are mutually reflected on the hollow cloud, occasion the manifold variety. Afterwards he adds again, like *the appearance of brightness round about*. Again the Prophet confesses that his eyes were blinded, because he could not bear such great splendor. And God manifests himself familiarly to all his servants, yet so as not to foster our curiosity, to which mankind are 'far too inclined. God then wished to manifest himself as far as it was useful, but not so far as the desire of mankind — which is always immoderate — would carry them. Since mankind so eagerly strain themselves that they easily become weakened, we must remark what the Prophet inculcates a second time, namely, *that the appearance of brightness was seen round about*. Of what sort, then, was that brightness? Why, such as to blind the Prophet's eyes, and to render him conscious of his weakness, so that he should not desire to know more than was lawful, but submit himself humbly to God.

At length he says, *this was a vision of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah*, and by these words confirms what I have said before, that the glory, of God was so beheld by the Prophet, that God did not appear as he really is, but as far as he can be beheld by mortal man. For if the angels tremble at God's glory, if they veil themselves with their wings, what should we do who creep upon this earth? We must hold, then, that as often as the Prophets and holy fathers saw God, they saw *as it were the likeness or aspect of the glory of God*, but not the glory itself, for they were not fit for it; for this would be to measure with the palm of our hands a hundred thousand heavens, and earths, and worlds. For God is infinite; and when the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, how can our minds comprehend him? But although God has never appeared in his immeasurable glory, and has never manifested himself as he really exists, yet we must nevertheless hold that he has so appeared as to leave no doubt in the minds of his servants as to their knowing that they have seen God. And this is the purport of those phrases which sometimes appear difficult. I have seen God face to face, says Jacob. (Genesis 32:30.) But was he so foolish as to think that he saw God like a mortal? by no means; but that appearance convinced him of its certainty, as if he had said that no specter by which he could be deceived was presented to his view; for the devil deludes us unless we are attentive and cautious. Therefore Jacob here distinguishes the vision which he enjoyed from all prodigies in which profane nations delighted. Familiar knowledge, then, is the meaning of seeing face to face. At the same time, as I have said, God never gave the Fathers a sight of himself except according to their capacity. He always had respect to their faculties, and this is the meaning of the phrase, *this was a vision of the splendor of Jehovah's glory*. Since, then, it is certain that Christ was beheld by him, he is Jehovah, that is, Eternal God; and although he is distinct from the person of the Father, yet he is entirely God, for the Father is in him: for the essence cannot be divided without impiety, although the persons must be distinguished. The rest I shall put off till tomorrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, O Almighty God, since of thine unbounded goodness, thou hast counted us worthy of such honor as to descend to earth in the person of thine only-begotten Son, and to appear familiarly

to us daily in thy gospel, in which we contemplate thy living image: — grant, I pray thee, that we may not abuse so great a benefit to vain curiosity, but may be truly transformed into thy glory, and so proceed more and more in the renewal of our mind and conduct, that we may at length be gathered to that eternal glory which has been obtained for us by thine only-begotten Son our Lord. Amen.

LECTURE SIXTH.

After the Prophet has recited the Vision, the object of which was to confirm his mission, he now adds, *I fell upon my face*, by which words he expresses his persuasion that God's glory was manifested to him. For the knowledge of God does truly humble us, while the Prophet also teaches that men cannot be brought to order unless they are laid prostrate: for he does not say that he was only prepared to receive the commands of God, nor does he commend his own teachableness, but rather signifies that he was violently thrown down. For he had not all at once put off the affections of the flesh; but we know that confidence is born with us. Therefore, because the Prophet was not naturally disposed to obey God, he ought to be cast down with fear, that at length he might be really humbled. Now he adds:

CHAPTER 2

Ezekiel 2:1-2

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| <p>1. And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.</p> <p>2. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.</p> | <p>1. Et dixit ad me, Fili hominis sta super pedes tuos, et loquar tecum.</p> <p>2. Et venit in me spiritus cum loqueretur ad me, et statuit me super pedes meos, et audiui loquentem ad me.</p> |
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Here the Prophet narrates that he was chosen by the command of God. For God never prostrates his people so as to leave them lying upon the earth, but continually raises them afterwards. As to the reprobate, they are so frightened at the sight of God, that they utterly fall and never rise again. But it is different with the faithful, because the pride of the flesh is corrected in them; then God stretches forth his hand to them, and restores them, as it were, from death to life. And this difference we must mark diligently, because we see the impious often dread the voice of God. But if they disdainfully despise him when speaking, they are frightened by his hand when some signs of his wrath and vengeance appear: but yet they remain lifeless. In like manner the faithful dread the voice of God, but the result is altogether different, as we see here: because after God has humbled them, he commands them to be of good courage, and shows that he intended nothing else but to establish them by his power. At the same time the Prophet teaches that nothing was accomplished by this voice till the Spirit was added. God indeed works efficiently by his own words, but we must hold that this efficacy is not contained in the words themselves, but proceeds from the secret instinct of the Spirit. The Prophet therefore shows us both truths. On one side he says, *I heard the voice of God, so that I stood on my feet*: God thus wished to animate his confidence: but he adds that he was not raised up by the voice, until *the Spirit placed him on his feet*.

This work of the Spirit, then, is joined with the word of God. But a distinction is made, that we may know that the external word is of no avail by itself, unless animated by the power of the Spirit. If any one should object, that the word was useless, because not efficacious by itself, the solution is at hand, that if God takes this method of acting there is no reason why we should object to it. But we have a still clearer reply: since God always works in the hearts of men by the Spirit, yet his word is not without fruit; because, as God enlightens us by the sun, and yet he alone is the Father of Lights, and the splendor of the sun is profitless except as God uses it as an instrument, so we must conclude concerning his word, because the Holy Spirit penetrates our hearts, and thus enlightens our minds. All power of action, then, resides in the Spirit himself, and thus all praise ought to be entirely referred to God alone. Meanwhile, what objection is there to the Spirit of God using instruments? We hold, therefore, that when God speaks, he adds the efficacy of his Spirit, since his word without it would be fruitless; and yet the word is effectual, because the instrument ought to be united with the author of the action. This doctrine, thus briefly expounded, may suffice to refute foolish objections, which are always in the mouths of many who fret about man's free-will: they say, that we can either attend to the word which is offered to us or re-jeer it: but we see what the Prophet says. If any of us is fit for rendering obedience to God, the Prophet certainly excelled in this disposition, and yet the word of God had no efficacy in his case, until the Spirit gave him

strength *to rise upon his feet* Hence we collect, that it is not in our power to obey what God commands us, except this power proceeds from him. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 2:3

3. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, *even* unto this very day. 3. Et dixit ad me: Fili hominis mitto to ⁵⁷ ad filios Israel, ad gentes rebelles *vel defectrices*, quae rebellarunt ⁵⁸ in me: ipsi et partes eorum perfidie se gesserunt erga me usque ad ipsum huic diem.

The Prophet now more clearly explains the object of the vision which he has formerly mentioned, namely, that being armed with authority he might more freely discharge the office of Prophet among the Israelites. For we know that God claims this honor to himself alone, that he should be head in his Church, and deservedly so, for he is not called our Lawgiver in vain, (Isaiah 33:22; James 4:12,) and our wisdom consists in nothing else but in attending to his instructions. Since, therefore, God alone is to be heard, every mortal, whatever he professes himself, must be rejected, unless he comes in the name of God, and can prove his calling, and really convince men that he does not speak except by God's command. Therefore, that Ezekiel may not labor in vain, he ought to prove himself divinely inspired, and this was done by the vision. Now he more clearly explains that object of the vision. Here it may be remarked, that figures are illusory without an explanation. If the vision only had been offered to the eye of the Prophet, and no voice of God had followed, what would have been the advantage? But when God confirmed the vision by his word, the Prophet was enabled to say with advantage, I have seen the glory of God. And this can also be transferred to sacraments, because if signs only are presented to our eyes they will be, as it were, dead images. The word of God, then, throws life into the sacraments, as it has been said concerning visions.

Since Ezekiel so often uses this form of speech, saying, that he was called *Son of man*, I do not doubt that God wished to prevent the people from despising him as one of the common herd. For he had been dragged into exile not without ignominy: since then he differed from the generality in no outward appearance, his doctrine might be despised and rejected. God, therefore, takes him up, and, by way of concession, calls him Son of man. So, on the other hand, he signifies that the teaching ought not to be estimated by outward appearance, but rather by his calling. It is quite true, that his language was then more prolix, and we see how our Prophet differs from the rest. For his language has evidently a foreign tinge, since those who are in exile naturally contract many faults of language, and the Prophet was never anxious about elegance and polish, but, as he had been accustomed to homely language, so he spoke himself. But I have no doubt that God wished purposely to select a man from the multitude contemptible in outward appearance, and then to raise him above all mortals by dignifying him with the gift of prophecy.

⁵⁷ Literally, "I sending thee." — Calvin.

⁵⁸ *Rebelled*. This word is the same as the last. — Calvin.

We must now see how God prepares him for the discharge of his duties. *I send thee*, he says, *to the children of Israel, a rebellious race*, that is, disobedient and revolting. In this manner the Prophet was able to escape as soon as he saw the odious duty' assigned to him, for its difficulty alone would frighten him. But a double trial is added when he saw himself engaged in a contest with numberless enemies. He challenged, as it were, to conflict all the Israelites of his day, and this was a most grievous trial. But another trial was, not only that he perceived himself beating the air, — to use a common proverb, rebut he must have felt it a profanation of heavenly doctrine to address it to impious men, and that too only for the purpose of exasperating them still further. We see, then, that the Prophet had no inducement of earthly gratification to urge him to undertake his duty. If God wished to use his agency, he ought to afford him some hope of success, or, at least, he ought to leave it sufficiently uncertain to urge him to make every effort. But when in the first instance this difficulty occurs, that he has to deal with a perverse and stubborn generation — next, that he is drawn into a hateful contest — thirdly, that he is advised to cast what is holy before dogs, and pearls before swine, and thus, as it were, to prostitute the word of God, surely his mind must despair a hundred times when he pondered these things within himself. Hence it was God's plan to arm him with unconquerable constancy, so that he might go forward in the course of his calling.

We must bear in mind, then, this principle: when God wishes to stir us up to obedience, he does not always promise a happy result of our labor: but sometimes he so puts our obedience to the test, that he wishes us to be content with his command, even if our labor should be deemed ridiculous before men. Sometimes, indeed, he indulges our infirmity, and when he orders us to undertake any duty, he at the same time bears witness that our labor shall not be in vain, and our industry without its recompense: then indeed God spares us. But he sometimes proves his people as I have said, providing that whatever be the result of their labors, it is sufficient for them to obey his command. And from

passage we readily collect that our Prophet was thus dispirited. And we read the same of Isaiah; for when he is sent by God, he is not only told that he must speak to the deaf, but what God proposes to him is still harder. Go, says he, render the eyes of this people blind, and their ears dull, and their heart obstinate. (Isaiah 6:9, 10.) Not only therefore does Isaiah see that he would be exposed to ridicule, and so lose the fruit of his labor, but he sees that his address has but one tendency, and that the blinding of the Jews: nay, even their threefold destruction — though even one destruction is enough: but, as I have already said, God sometimes so wishes his servants to acquiesce in his government, that they should labor even without any hope of fruit: and this must be diligently marked. For as often as we are called upon by God before we apply ourselves to our work, these thoughts come into the mind: "What will be the result of this?" and "What shall I obtain by my labor?" And, then, when the event does not turn out according to our wish, we despond in our minds: but this is wresting from God a part of his government. For although our labor should be in vain, yet it is sufficiently pleasing to God himself; therefore let us learn to leave the event in the hand of God when he enjoins anything upon us; and although the whole world should deride us, and despair itself should render us inactive, yet let us be of good cheer and strive to the utmost, because it ought to suffice us that our obedience is pleasing to God.

For this reason Paul says, (2 Corinthians 2:15, 16,) that the gospel, although it is a savor of death unto death, is yet a sweet savor unto God. When it is said that the gospel brings death, our judgment might immediately suggest to us, that nothing is better than to leave it. Therefore Paul meets us, and says, we ought not to judge the gospel by its success. Although, therefore, men not

only remain deaf, but even become worse, and rush headlong in fury against God, yet the gospel always retains its sweet savor before God. The doctrine of the Prophet is the same. Now, if any one objects that God acts cruelly while he so purposely blinds men, that those who are already sufficiently lost perish twice or thrice over, the answer is at hand — God offers his word indiscriminately to the good and bad, but it works by his Spirit in the elect, as I have already said; and as to the reprobate, the doctrine is useful, as it renders them without excuse. Next, that their obstinacy may be broken down — for since they refuse to yield willingly to God, it is necessary that they should yield when conquered — when, therefore, God sees the reprobate thus broken down, he strikes them with the hammer of his word. At length he takes away all excuse of ignorance, because being convicted of their own conscience, whether they will or not, they become their own judges, and their mouth is stopped. Although they do not cease their rebellion against God, yet they are subject to his judgment. Although, therefore, this may seem absurd, that God should send his Prophets to render the people blind, yet we must reverently submit to his counsel, even if the cause is unknown to us for a time. But, as I have said, we do understand, to a certain extent, why God thus strives with rebellious and obstinate men.

Now, therefore, since at the very beginning Ezekiel is informed of the result, it is scarcely doubtful that God wished to prepare him to descend to the discharge of his duty without yielding to any obstacles. For some who seem to be sufficiently ready to obey, yet when difficulties and obstacles occur, desist in the middle of their course, and many recede altogether; and some we see who have renounced their vocation, because they had conceived great and excessive hopes of success, but when the event does not answer their expectations, they think themselves discharged from duty, and even murmur against God, and reject the burden, or rather shake off what had been imposed upon them. Because, then, many retreat from the course they had undertaken, because they do not experience the success they had imagined, or had presumed upon in their minds, therefore before Ezekiel begins to speak, God sets before him trials of this kind, and informs him that he would have to deal with a rebellious people.

He says *the children of Israel are a revolting nation*; for *mered*, signifies to rebel or resist, and the noun “rebellious” is suitable enough. Therefore *I send thee to the rebellions nations*, because directly after follows the word *merdo*, which means *who have rebelled against me*. We know that among the Jews this is a word of reproach; for they often call us *gaim* “Gentiles,” as if they called us “profane,” “rejected,” and altogether alienated from God. Lastly, this word *gaim* means with them “pollution” and “abomination;” we are to the Jews like dung, and the off-scouring of the world, because we are *gaim*. And there is no doubt that this pride filled the minds of the people in the days of the Prophet; God therefore calls them *unbelieving nations*. I confess, indeed, that this is sometimes used in a good sense; but because the Scriptures more usually call foreigners *gaim* who are not partakers of God’s covenant, hence it became a mark of disgrace and reproach among the Jews. It is scarcely doubtful, then, but that God wished to abolish the honorable title which he had assigned to them; for it was a holy nation and a priestly kingdom. When, therefore, God calls them *gaim*, it is just as if he should say, that they were cut off from all that dignity in which they formerly excelled, and differed in nothing from the profane and re-jeered nations, as we have a similar description in Hosea. There the Prophet is ordered to take a harlot to wife. (Hosea 1.) He says that he begat a son and a daughter, and that, he called the son *lo-ammi* that is, “not God people.” Then he called his daughter “not beloved.” By this vision the Prophet shows that the Jews were rejected, so that God no longer thinks of them as sons, but repels them as foreigners. So

also in this place rejection is denoted, when the Prophet, as the mouth of God, calls them Gentiles. The plural number is used, that he may the better express the defection which oppressed the whole people. If a few only were such as this, the Prophet might still feel encouraged. But God here pronounced the severest sentence, because the whole people, taken both at large and separately, was rebellious; and this is the reason why the plural number is used.

Is 'it then asked whether a single individual remained who would embrace the Prophet's doctrine? The answer is easy. The discourse does not relate to individuals, but to the whole people; for the Prophets often use similar language, as when *they* call the Israelites degenerate and spurious, then sons of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the offspring of Canaan: they inveigh against the multitude promiscuously; for they had in fact a few disciples who could not be classed in that order. (Isaiah 1:10; Isaiah 8:16; Isaiah 57:3; Ezekiel 16:3.) But we must hold what is said by Isaiah 8. — "Bind my testimony upon my disciples." There the Prophet is ordered from above to address the faithful, of whom a small number remained, and so to address them as if the letter were folded and sealed. But he spreads abroad this discourse among the whole people. So also when God pronounces the sons of Israel to be *rebellious nations*, he looks to the body of the people; at the same time there is no doubt that God always preserved a seed to serve him, although hidden from man. Daniel was then in exile with his colleagues, and he surely was not a rebel against God; but as I have already said, enough has been brought forward to show that the whole people were impious. God says that he had previously tried what the people was — They *have rebelled*, he says, *against me*; by which words he signifies that he was not making an experiment as if they were previously unknown. He says that he had already found out their perverseness by many trials; and yet he says that *he sends to them*, because he wished, as I have already said, to render their ignorance perfectly excuseless, and then he wished to break down their *contumacy*, which was otherwise untameable.

He says, *they and their fathers have behaved themselves treacherously against me even to this very day* He does not extenuate their crime when he says, that they imitated the example of their fathers, but he rather increases their own impiety when he says they were not the beginners of it, but were born of impious parents, as if he should say, according to the vulgar proverb, "a chip of the old block."⁵⁹ Hence it appears that there is no pretext for the error when we use the fathers as the Papists do, who oppose them as a shield to God; for whilst they have the fathers on their tongue, they esteem this a sufficient defense for every impiety. But we see that God not only reckons this as nothing, but that the crime of the children is exaggerated when they plead the evil example of their fathers as the cause of their own obstinacy. Now, not only does the Prophet desire to show this to be a frivolous excuse, if the Jews should object that they framed their life in imitation of their fathers, but as we see, it shows them doubly condemned, because they did not desist from provoking God at the beginning, and so by a continual succession, impiety and contempt of heavenly teaching prevailed through all ages, even to their own. Besides, this passage warns us against abusing the long-suffering of God; for when he sent his Prophet we see the purport of his doing so — the people was now on the brink of utter destruction, but God wished to plunge them deeper into the lowest abyss. Let us take care lest a similar punishment should be our lot if we remain obstinate. When, therefore, God sends some Prophets to one people, and some to another:, it ought to recall us to penitence, and to caution us, lest the word which is peculiarly destined to the salvation of men, should be to us a savor of death unto death, as it was to the ancient people. It follows —

⁵⁹ Calvin's Latin is *mala ova malorum corvorum* — *Tr.*

Ezekiel 2:4-5

4. For *they are* impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD. **4.** Et filii duri fade, et robusti corde: ergo mitto to ad eos. et dices illis, Sic dieit Dominator Iehovah.

5. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they *are* a domus rebellionis ipsi: et ⁶⁰ scient quod propheta rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath fuerit inter ipsos. **5.** Et ipsi sive audiant sive desistant quoniam Et ipsi sive audiant sive desistant quoniam been a prophet among them.

God proceeds in the same discourse, but expresses in other words the great rebellion of the people, for they were not only obstinate and unbending in heart, but also of a contumacious countenance: therefore he places hardness in face as well as in heart. The words indeed are different, *keshi*, and *chezki*, “*of* brazen countenance,” for we may translate “winked” and “contumacious,” for this disposition appears in the countenance, nor is it objectionable to render it “*impudent*.” But, propriety of speech must be retained; for we must speak of the robust of heart as “*broken down*,” or if the allusion seems more apposite, we must render it “*of broken countenance*,” then of “broken spirits,” as we call the wicked “brazen-fronted.” The meaning is, that the Jews were not only rebellious against God and puffed up with proud contempt, but their impiety was so desperate that they opposed themselves to God without disguise, as if they had been horned oxen or furious bulls. We know that hypocrisy often lies hid in the mind, and although men swell with malice, yet they do not betray what they inwardly nourish. But the Prophet here signifies that the Israelites were so immersed in impiety, that they displayed themselves as the open enemies of God in their very countenances. The result is, that the Prophet, while he applied himself to perform the commands of God, ought so to determine with himself, when he approaches the people, that his teaching would be not only useless as to them, because it would not be received with the reverence which it deserves, but would be even exposed to many reproaches: since the Israelites were not only filled with a hidden contempt of God, but they openly showed their ferocity, so to speak, since they were of so brazen a front that they would without doubt purposely reject the Prophet. *They are hard-hearted children, etc., yet I send thee unto them* Here, again, God opposes his own command, as the Prophet simply acquiesces in this word alone, “I have a divine mission.” If he displeases men, he is content to have his labor approved of God. This is the meaning of the phrase which is now a second time repeated, *I send thee unto them* For the Prophet might object, What can I do? for if they are of a brazen heart and of an iron front, I shall labor in vain. But God answers in return, that the Prophet need not be anxious, it is enough to have a command: as if a prince should not explain the whole of his counsel to his ambassador, and yet should order him to discharge his embassy, thus God acts towards his servant. We see then how God here magnifies his authority: and we must mark this diligently, that we may not wish always to be bargaining with him, as we are accustomed. For unless God show us the present fruit of our labor, we languish, and

⁶⁰ The copula “and” is here redundant, but it may be resolved into the adverb of time or the adversative particle — “trot they shall know.” — Calvin.

so we endeavor by turning back to withdraw ourselves from his authority: but God opposes this single sentence, *Behold I send thee* The rest I leave till to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, O Almighty God, since thou hast counted us worthy of enjoying the privilege of daily listening to thy word, that it may not find our hearts of stone and our minds of iron, but may we so submit ourselves to thee with all due docility, that we may truly perceive thee to be our Father, and may be confirmed in the confidence of our adoption, as long as thou perseverest to address us, until at length we enjoy not merely thy voice, but also the aspect of thy glory in thy heavenly kingdom, which thine only-begotten Son has acquired for us by his blood. — Amen.

LECTURE SEVENTH.

After God has admonished his servant as to the difficulty of his mission, he now strengthens him and exhorts him to unconquered freedom. *Thou shalt say*, says he, *Thus saith the Lord*, as if he should say, this alone is sufficient for overcoming all obstacles, that he has to take in hand God's business. For even here God does not give fixed commands, that he will do afterwards in its place, but the observation is general. *Thus saith Jehovah*: that is, I bring forward nothing of myself, but faithfully relate what God has commanded. We see then the Almighty's object here: viz., to oppose his name to the obstinacy of the people, and he orders the Prophet when instructed by his authority to be of a brave and intrepid disposition, although he has stern and hard-hearted enemies. Afterwards he adds, *whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, yet they shall acknowledge that a prophet has been among them*

Here, again, God exhorts his servant to persevere whatever be the event of his labor, for if we do not succeed according to the desire of our minds, we are inclined to despair: but God wishes us to proceed in the course of our duty, though all things should turn out contrary to our wishes. But he shows that there shall be some fruit of our labor, although the people, through their own depravity, reject what has been said to them: for this thought breaks the spirits of God's servants, when they do not perceive the usefulness of their labor: for we always desire to accomplish something worth the trouble which we give to it. God therefore here signifies that he has some other object in view than the salvation of men; namely, the removal of all pretext for error, and the stripping off of every disguise of impiety in which men willingly clothe themselves. For even hypocrites, though they perish knowingly and willfully, yet think themselves excusable, unless God afford them the light of his doctrine. The meaning therefore is, although the Prophet's teaching would not profit the Israelites, yet it would be useful in another way, namely, *that they may perceive that there has been a prophet among them* In this way there is no defect, although some think the words of the Prophet abrupt: for an important word seems to be wanting when he says, *whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, because they are a rebellious house, and they shall know*, etc. For we have said that the copula ought to be resolved into the adversative particle, *because even then they shall know*: for their perverseness shall not prevent their being convinced by God. We may learn then from this place, that although the impious furiously endeavor to reject the doctrine of God, yet they obtain

no other end than the more complete manifestation of their own wickedness. Hence, also, we may learn that God's doctrine is precious to himself, and that he cannot bear us to despise it. The wicked then never can escape punishment when they treat with contempt the divine teaching, for it is as if they trampled upon inestimable treasure, Those who are left without the law and the prophets shall not escape God's hand, because their conscience is sufficient to take away all excuse. (Romans 2:12.) But when God invites men to himself, and approaches near them, and offers himself to them in a peculiar manner as their Father and Teacher, if they reject so remarkable a benefit, truly their ingratitude is worthy of the utmost severity. For as often as God raises up prophets for us and faithful ministers of his doctrine, let this which has just been said come into our minds: unless we embrace such a benefit, we at length shall know that a prophet has been among us, because God will exact fearful vengeance for the contempt of his great loving-kindness. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 2:6

6. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of **6.** Et tu fili hominis ne timeas ab illis, et a them, neither be afraid of their words, though sermonibus eorum ne timeas quia rebelles ⁶¹ *sunt*, briars and thorns *be* with thee, and thou dost et spinæ tecum *erga* to, et cam scorpionibus tu dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their habitas: a sermonibus eorum ne timeas, et a facie words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though eorum. he frangaris, quia domus rebellis ipsi *sunt*. they *be* a rebellious house.

Here God again commands his servant to break forth boldly, even if the people deny him all approach through their malice and wickedness. But because we often fail through terror; God arms his Prophet with impregnable confidence against the threats of the people, and then against all discourses of every sort. He brings forward no other reason *than they are a rebellious house*, or a rebellious and perverse nation. For we said, though at the first glance it might seem cold, yet it suffices to animate the servants of God to know that he commands nothing rashly, and when they acknowledge that God is pleased by their spending their breath upon the deaf, yet they do not cease to discharge their duty, although they fatigue themselves in vain as far as the world is concerned. But now when this thought is added, that God will take care of his own servants, it doubles their confidence and good spirits. Thus it happens, that all threats and terrors being despised, they discharge their duty boldly. For this reason he now says, *thou, son of man, do not be afraid of them, nor be terrified at their words* By “words,” I do not understand simply threats but calumnies by which we know the servants of God to be oppressed. For hypocrites rise up with great confidence and complain of the injury done to them, and then presumptuously take upon themselves the name of God, as at this time the Papists not only vomit out threats by which they disturb us, but haughtily boast themselves to be the Church, and confirm this by perpetual succession; then they say that the Church never is without the Holy Spirit, and hence it cannot happen that God should ever desert them. We see, therefore, that the domestic enemies of God not only use threats against his servants,

⁶¹ The word is different from *mordim*, *rebellious*, Ezekiel 2:3; but commentators translate it the same, though perhaps it signifies something else, for it is not in common use among the Hebrews. — *Calvin*.

but at the same time bring many false pretenses by which they load the true and faithful Prophets with envy and hatred. But, however such calumnies have some appearance of truth when its enemies unjustly press us, God orders us to proceed with unconquered fortitude. *Be not afraid*, therefore, he says, *of either them, or their words* And since the same phrase is repeated shortly afterwards, hence we infer that it has no common meaning. It is therefore worthy of observation, that God once, yea twice, pronounces that we ought not to fear their words who boast themselves to be the Church of God, and doubt not petulantly to render that sacred name a laughing-stock by their use of it. Since, therefore, God allows us to despise language of this kind, there is no reason why the Papists of this day should daunt us, when, with inflated cheeks, they thunder out the name of the Church and the Apostolic authority; for just honor is not attributed to God, unless every lofty thing in the world is compelled to obey him, so that the doctrine alone may shine forth which comes direct from the mouth of God.

Now he adjoins, *because*, (or *although*, for this causal particle may be resolved adversatively,) *however rebellious they may be, and like thorns, however thou mayest dwell among scorpions, yet do not fear their words, and do not be broken down by their appearance*, , *chetheth*, signifies to be rubbed and broken, and it is here transferred to the mind, and is to be metaphorically understood for being broken in spirit, as if it had been said, be thou intrepid in receiving all threats and calumnies, *because they are a rebellious house* This passage teaches us that none are fit to undertake the prophetic office, unless those who are armed with fortitude and perseverance whatever may happen, so that they do not fear any threats, nor hesitate or vacillate when oppressed by unjust calamities. So Paul says, (2 Corinthians 6:8,) that he persevered through both evil report and good report, although he was unworthily slandered by the wicked. Whoever, therefore, wishes to prepare himself faithfully for undertaking the office of a teacher, should be endued with such constancy that he may oppose, as it were, an iron front to all calumnies and curses, threats and terrors.

We cannot doubt but that the Israelites were much enraged when they heard themselves called thorns and scorpions. But they ought to be thus stung, since if they had been attacking a mortal man only, they would conduct themselves far more petulantly. But when God pronounces them *scorpions and thorns*, and they see the Prophet performing commands of this kind fearlessly and without hesitation, they are necessarily impelled to either fury or silence. But when they have striven to the very last in their obstinacy and hardness, yet God at length causes them to yield through shame, because truth has prevailed, of which the Prophet was a minister endued with such great fortitude of mind. We also perceive from this passage, that the Prophets often spoke with great asperity when the wickedness of those with whom they had to deal required it: yet they were not hurried away into any excess, or carried forward with intemperance against their adversaries. But they could not in any other way vindicate their doctrine against the wicked, who, impelled by a diabolical fury, strove with even God himself. We must hold, therefore, that although they were cruel and severe in language, yet they breathed pure humanity from the heart. For our Prophet was not a barbarous man, who excited by indignation, vomited out coarse reproaches against his own people, but the Spirit of God dictated, as we see, what might seem too severe to soft and delicate ears.

Ezekiel 2:7

7. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether will forbear: et si destiterint, quia rebelles sunt.⁶² for they *are* most rebellious.

Again he repeats what he had said, with but the change of a few words, yet the meaning is the same, that the Prophet should not desist in the midst of his course, if he saw that he did not obtain what he wished and hoped for. For when we apply ourselves to what God commands, we ought to be of good cheer, and expect that some fruit of our labor may appear. We may, therefore, indulge both hopes and wishes, but if it should turn out otherwise than we anticipated, yet we ought to leave the result in the hands of God, and to proceed even to the goal in the discharge of our duty. To this end this sentence tends: *thou, says he, shalt utter my words*, or pronounce my words, *whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear*: that is, even if you sing a song to the deaf, according to the proverb, yet you shall not cease to utter my words: and he adds the reason, *because they are a rebellious house*. God admonishes his servant beforehand, that there was no reason why he should turn back although he should see no fruit of his labors, because he ought to determine this in his mind, although they have no ears yet he must speak in God's name. It is certain, as we mentioned yesterday, that there were some, though few in number, to whom his teaching was useful, but he treats here of the people at large. We must learn, therefore, when God calls us to the office of teaching, not to regard the conduct of mankind. For if it please God to exercise us while we strive with the rebellious and refractory, yet God's word must be uttered, because he commands it. It follows —

Ezekiel 2:8

8. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious re, ne sis rebellis quemadmodum domus haec:⁶³ house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. aperi os tuum et comede quaecunque proposuero tibi.

God continues to confirm his servant, but he advises him of a cause of stumbling which might break his spirit; for when he perceived the great obstinacy of the house of Israel, he might refuse the office of their teacher a hundred times over. God, however, adds incentives and exhortations to perseverance, although he experiences the abandoned obstinacy of the house of Israel: *do thou hear*, says he, *what I shall say to thee* Here we see that no one can discharge the teacher's office, unless he be a proficient in God's school. It behoves, therefore, those who wish to be thought disciples of God to be teachers of truth, and for this purpose first to listen to God's instructions.

⁶² Otherwise, Thou shalt pronounce my words to them, whether they will hear, or whether they will refuse to hear, for surely they are men of rebellion. — Calvin.

⁶³ Israel must be understood. — Calvin.

Then he takes away a stumblingblock, as we have said, *be not thou, rebellious like the house of Israel* For we know that a multitude has much influence over us to disturb us: for the consent of a whole people is like a violent tempest, where all conspire together, and even those who are not wicked yet are carried forward with the crowd. Since, therefore, the, multitude sometimes carries away even the servants of God, here God meets his Prophet and puts a bridle upon him, *that thou be not rebellious*, says he, *like the house of Israel* He does not here speak indefinitely concerning any people, but concerning ‘that nation which boasted itself to be divinely elected, and bore in the flesh the symbol of its adoption. Yet God wishes the consent of his people to be neglected by his Prophet, because we know how insolently the Israelites boasted themselves to be the sacred and peculiar people of God; in the same way indeed as the Papists now exult, Israel then vaunted against all the Prophets. And therefore this passage must be diligently observed, because at this day many of these magnificent titles vanish away when they are brought to reason: for we know that they are mere smoke by which Satan endeavors to blind our eyes, while he falsely brings forward the name of God and the Church.

We ought, indeed, to receive whatever is uttered by God with such modesty and veneration that we may be completely affected as soon as his name is mentioned, but meanwhile we must. use prudence and discretion, lest we should be struck with awe when Satan uses God’s name to deceive us. And as we must use discernment, God here shows us the rule of doing so. For if we are thoroughly persuaded that, the doctrine which we follow and profess is from God, we can safely look down from on high not only upon all mortals but upon angels themselves: for there is no excellence so great but that God’s truth outshines it. Therefore when formerly the Israelites pretended that they were God’s people, and were adorned by the marks of a true Church, we must hold that the honor of the Church is frivolous when hypocrites reign in it, or rather exercise impious tyranny, and oppose themselves to God and his doctrine. And at this very day we may turn this passage against the Papists — nay, even point it at them directly as often as they bring up those pompous titles of “the Catholic Church,” and “the Spouse of Christ,” for God has said once for all, that we ought not to be rebellious, although the whole house of Israel should become so; that is, although those who bring forward the name of God should mutually enter into a diabolic conspiracy, yet we must not regard their conduct so as to subscribe to their impious conspiracy. We read the same in Isaiah, (Isaiah 8:12, 13,) Thou shalt not say a conspiracy whenever this people says conspiracy: thou shalt not feel their fear nor their dread, but sanctify the Lord of hosts. Which passage Peter also cites, (1 Peter 3:14, 15;) because the Jews, who then pertinaciously opposed the gospel, weakened the feeble by their boasting, by saying that they were the Church, and yet rejected and abominated the new teaching which was then spread abroad: Peter cites that place of the Prophet, namely, although the house of Israel impiously conspired against God, yet such contumacy must be despised. Afterwards the Prophet adds, (Isaiah 8:18,) Behold! I and the children whom God hath given me for a sign and a wonder. He says, therefore, that those little ones who worship God purely, and withdraw themselves from the common impiety, were like monsters, and were esteemed as complete wonders. But the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews accommodates this place to the reign of Christ, (Hebrews 2:13,) and not without reason. For to this day we are a wonder to God’s enemies, who carry themselves not only with boldness but with abandoned impudence against the pure doctrine of the gospel. To them we are heretics, schismatics, dogs — nay, the offscouring of the world. But although we are to them for signs and wonders, it is sufficient for us to be acknowledged by God: because it is needful for us to be separated from that impious conspiracy unless we wish to be separated

from God himself. For what agreement is there with Papists, or what union with those dregs, unless by separation from God himself? Therefore, because we cannot extend the hand to Papists on any other condition, and cultivate a brotherly intercourse with them except by denying God, let all that injurious union with them cease, and let us learn to separate from them with boldness, since we clearly see that we are all commanded to act thus in the person of the Prophet: for he had said a little before, a prophet dwells in the midst of them — and this was clearly expressed, that he might manifest more anxious care for himself. For it is difficult to walk amidst thorns and scorpions, lest we should be pricked, and lest we should be struck by their virulent tail. God, then, commands us to be so attentive, that although we walk amid thorns we should not be pricked by them, and also that we should not be injured by the poison of scorpions; and if we seek from heaven that prudence which does not naturally belong to us, this will happen, for if the Spirit of God govern us, he will preserve us harmless from every bite of the serpent, and from all injury and mischief.

It follows: *open thy mouth, and eat whatever I shall put before thee* By this practical symbol God confirms Ezekiel in his vocation: for he orders him *to eat a book*, which was fulfilled in vision. Jeremiah uses the same metaphor, (Jeremiah 15:16,) but with some slight difference, because our Prophet seemed to himself to eat a volume: but Jeremiah only signifies that he had digested the words of God like food, not that he only tasted them with his tongue, and that they were so thoroughly fixed in his mind as if he had really dressed and digested them. But God wished to confirm our Prophet in another way, namely, by offering him a volume, and commanding him to eat it. There is no doubt that this volume comprehended whatever the Spirit of God afterwards dictated to the Prophet; and yet the effect was just as if God had made a mortal the channel of his Spirit: as if he had said, “Now you shall utter nothing human nor terrestrial; because you shall utter what my Spirit has already written in this book.” But here we see a difference between the true servants of God, who discharge their duty in earnest, and talkative men, who are satisfied with their own powers of eloquence, or rather garrulity: for there are many ready speakers who utter what they have never digested, and thus their teaching is but vapid. And this is the meaning of what Paul says: the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. (1 Corinthians 4:20.) But those who truly consecrate themselves to God, not only learn what they speak of, but as food is eaten, so also they receive within them the word of God, and hide it in the inmost recesses of their heart, so that they may bring it forth from thence as food properly dressed. Now, therefore, we understand why God wished the Prophet to eat the book, concerning which also it follows afterwards —

Ezekiel 2:9-10

9. And when I looked, behold, an hand *was* **9.** Et aspexi, et ecce manus emissa ad me, et sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book *was* therein; *ecce* in ea volumen libri;

10. And he spread it before me; and it *was* **10.** Et explicuit coram facie *mea*, et ecce written within and without: and *there was* written scriptum erat volumen a facie et retro, ⁶⁴ et therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. scriptura ⁶⁵ lamentationes, et carmen, et we.

⁶⁴ “That is, behind and *before*.” — Calvin.

⁶⁵ “What was written in *it*.” — Calvin.

Now the Prophet more fully explains what we have just dwelt upon. He narrates how a *volume of a book was offered to him*: that is, a book in the form of a roll was offered to him. For the noun which he uses, *megleth*, comes from *gelel*, to roll, as the word *volume* among the Latins. For they were formerly accustomed to write on rolls, that is, they had not the form of books so compact and well arranged as we now use, but they had volumes, which barbarians call rolls. Ancient documents were written in this way, for there is nothing ancient in the archives of princes which is not written on rolls. Hence the phrase, “In the volume of the book it is written of me,” etc. (Psalm 40:8; Hebrews 10:7.) Now the Prophet says, *such a volume was offered to me that I might eat it*; and he adds, *it was offered to me by a hand sent forth*, But by this symbol God more clearly shows that the volume was not merely formed in the air, nor was produced anywhere but in heaven. For if the Prophet had only seen a volume presented to him, he might doubt whether it was sent by God or not. But when the hand which offers the volume appears, and is truly sent forth from God, nothing is wanting for full and complete certainty.

He adds, *after the volume was unrolled, that he saw it written on each side*: by which words he understands not that any brief command was given to him, but that a length of much time was imposed. For if he had only spoken concerning the roll, the Jews might have contemptuously rejected him after three or four days, as if he had come to an end. A roll was indeed offered to thee, but now thou hast spoken three or four times, is not this sufficient? Hence, as the Prophet might meet with neglect, he says, *the roll was written before and behind*. He now says, for such was his argument, *that lamentations only were written there*, *hegeh*, signifies sometimes meditation and speech simply, but here, *because* it is connected with lamentations, there is no doubt that it is to be taken for a mournful strain. At length the particle *hei*, is added in the sense of grieving. On the whole then, the Prophet teaches, that the instruction contained in the book was not sweet or pleasant, but full of sorrow, since truly God here showed proofs of his anger, and this cannot be apprehended unless by its causing grief and lamentations. Now, therefore, we understand that the Israelites were more and more exasperated, when the Prophet said, that he came like a herald who denounced war in the name of God, and, at the same time, had no message of peace. As to the rest of the people, we shall see afterwards, in many places, that he was a messenger of God’s mercy, but his duty was to rouse up the Jews, that they might feel God their adversary: thus the Prophet was sent with no other object than that of going, as an armed man, into the midst, and uttering threats in the name of God. I cannot now proceed further, although what follows is connected with this subject.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast this day deigned to invite us to thyself with the testimony of thy paternal favor, that we may not *be* as the beasts of the forest, but submit ourselves calmly to thee, and so follow where thou callest us, that we may in reality feel thee to be our Father; and thus may we live under the protection of thy hand as long as we are pilgrims in this world, so that at length being gathered unto thy heavenly kingdom, we may cleave entirely to thee and thine only-begotten Son, who is our felicity and glory. — Amen.

LECTURE EIGHTH.

CHAPTER 3

Ezekiel 3:1-2

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| <p>1. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.</p> <p>2. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.</p> | <p>1. Et dixit mihi, Fili hominis, quod inveneris, comedendo <i>comede</i>, volumen hoc, et vade loquere ad domum Israel.</p> <p>2. Et aperui os meum, et pavit me volumine isto.</p> |
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When the Prophet is ordered to eat whatever he receives, this ought not to be extended to everything which he meets with, but, whatever may be the taste of the book, he is forbidden to refuse it: for its bitterness might possibly cause him to reject the threats of God. Lastly, the quality of the book is noted, because it contained nothing but the material for sorrow. He adds, *that he opened his mouth*, for the sake of obedience; by which he signifies that he was not curious or dainty in seeking to taste it, but that he took what was divinely offered him, without the slightest hesitation. Now he adds —

Ezekiel 3:3

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| <p>3. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat <i>it</i>; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.</p> | <p>3. Et dixit mihi, Fili hominis, ventrem tuum pasce, et viscera tua reple ⁶⁶ volumine isto, quod ego do tibi, et comedi, et fuit in ore meo tanquam mel in dulcedine.</p> |
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Ezekiel, as we have just seen, proceeds to say, that a book was given him to eat, because God's servants ought to speak from the inmost affection of their heart. We know that many have a tongue sufficiently fluent, but use it only for ostentation: meanwhile, God treats their vanity as a laughing stock, because their labor is fruitless. Hence we must observe the passage of Paul already quoted, "the kingdom of God is with power." (1 Corinthians 4:20.) But the efficacy of the Holy Spirit is not exerted unless when he who is called to teach applies his serious endeavors to attain to the discharge of his duty. For this reason, then, Ezekiel is commanded to *eat the roll*. Next he says, *it was as sweet as honey*; and, but a little before, he said it was filled with curses: therefore, either he had put off all humanity, or ought to be grieved, when he found himself appointed to be the herald of God's vengeance. But, in other places, we saw that the servants of God were endued with feelings of an opposite kind; for, as they were often rough and stern like their work, so they consoled with the miserable people: but, their grief did not hinder them from proceeding in the discharge of their duty. For this reason Ezekiel now says, *the book was sweet*, because he acquiesced in God's commands, and although he pitied his own people, yet he acknowledged that it could not happen

⁶⁶ "Thou shalt fill." — Calvin

otherwise, and subscribed to the just judgment of God. Therefore, by the word *sweetness*, he signifies his acquiescence in embracing the office enjoined upon him, and he so obeyed God that he forgot all the material for sorrow in the book, because the justice of God prevailed and thus extinguished the feeling of too great humanity which might otherwise have delayed him. Jeremiah uses the same expression. (Jeremiah 15:16.) He says, that he found the words of God, and that they became to him gladness and joy of heart. For we saw, that he was only anxious but very sorrowful when he thought that utter destruction was impending over the people. But, as I have just said, these two things are not discordant: that Prophets should desire the safety of the people, and use their utmost endeavors to promote it, and yet manifest a firm constancy, and never hesitate, when necessity demands it, to condemn the people and to utter God's threats which are enjoined 'upon them. Thus shortly afterwards Jeremiah says, that he was filled with anger; thy words were found, says he, and I did eat them, and they afforded me joy and gladness of heart, because thy name has been called over me, O Jehovah God of hosts: that is, because I have been taught by the power of thy Spirit, and as I have been called to this office, so thou hast stretched forth thy hand unto me that I may fulfill thy commands with good faith and constancy: therefore thy words were my delight. Afterwards he adds, (Ezekiel 3:17,) neither have I sat in the council of scorers, nor have I exalted myself for the sake of throwing off the *yoke*; for since I perceived that thou must be *obeyed*, I was, as it were, overpowered, yet I did not sit with the scorers, but I sat alone, says he, because thou hast filled me with indignation. Hence we see, that in one person were two feelings very different and contrary in appearance, because he was filled with indignation, and yet received joy through the words of God.

Ezekiel 3:4-7

4. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. 4. Et dixit mihi, Fili hominis, vade (ingredere) ad domum Israel, et loquere ad eos in sermonibus meis.

5. For thou *art* not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, *but* to the house of Israel; 5. Quia non ad populum profundos ⁶⁷ labiis et gravem lingua, tu missus es ad domum (Israel scilicet.)

6. Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. 6. Non ad populos multos profundos labio et graves lingua quos non intelliges; ⁶⁸ si non ad eos misissem to, ipsi audissent to.

7. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for 7. Atqui ⁶⁹ domus Israel non volent ad audiendum to, quia si non volunt audire me, quia tota domus Israel duri fronte (vel proefracti) et robusto corde ipsi.

⁶⁷ That is, "profound in speech:" it is a collective noun, hence the number is changed: literally. "to a people profound in Up." — Calvin.

⁶⁸ That is. "whose language thou writ not understand. — Calvin.

all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hardhearted.

Now at greater length God explains why he wished his servant to eat the volume which he held forth in his hand, namely, that when instructed by it he might approach the children of Israel; for he ought not to come empty, and we know that man of himself can bring forward nothing solid: hence Ezekiel must receive from God's hand what he delivers to the Israelites. Let us then preserve this order, as the volume is first given to the Prophet, and then transferred to the people. God orders him, *to offer or speak his own words*, which is worthy of remark, as having the same meaning. But if Ezekiel ought to bring forward nothing but what he had received from God, this rule ought to prevail among all God's servants, that they should not heap up their own comments, but pronounce what God teaches them as if from his mouth: lastly, that passage of Peter (1 Peter 4:11) ought to guide us, he who speaks in the Church ought to speak the words of God. Now he adds, *I do not send thee to a people strange in speech and hard in language, but to the house of Israel* Stone think that the prophet is here animated to his duty, because God demanded nothing from him which was too difficult. For if he had been sent to remote nations with whom there was no interchange of speech, he might object that a greater burden than he could bear was imposed upon him. The difficulty would then have been a complete obstacle. They think that remote and foreign nations are here compared with the people of Israel, that he may discharge his duty with alacrity, as if it had been said, "*I do not send thee to strangers. For neither could they understand thee, and they also would be barbarians to thee, but because thou art familiarly acquainted with thine own people, thou canst not turn thy back when I send thee unto them.*" But this opinion does not approve itself to me, because I read these three verses in the same context, as they are united. It is by no means doubtful, that, by this comparison, God aggravates the impiety of the people. For this sentence is first in order, that the Israelites would be deaf, although the Prophet should use among them the common and vernacular language: this is the first point: now he shows the reason, because *they were a bitter people* Here God signifies, that nothing prevented the Israelites from obeying the doctrine of the Prophet but their malice and impiety. For this reason he says, *I do not send thee to a people profound in speech* I know not how some have conjectured that this epithet means learned or clever; for it is the same thing for a people to be of a strange speech and of a hard language. For what is a "*hard*" but a barbarous language? Now we perceive the genuine sense, that the Prophet is not sent to men of an unknown language because he would have been a barbarian to them and they to him. *I do not send thee to them, therefore, but to the house of Israel.*

Now he adds, *not to many peoples* Those who translate "*many*" by "*great*," do not understand the Prophet's meaning, for God had spoken in the singular number concerning all people, but now he uses the plural, as if he had said, I send thee neither to Egyptians, nor to Chaldeans, nor to any other remote nation, since the world is on all sides of thee, inhabited by peoples whose language thou dost not understand: to those therefore I do not send thee. The particle, *if not*, follows, and Jerome translates, "If I had sent thee unto them," although the negative particle is interposed, literally, *if not*, but because this phrase appears harsh, some have supposed - , *am-la*, to have the sense of swearing, and interpret it affirmatively for , *cameth*, "*truly*," or "*surely*." But if we

⁶⁹ The copula here is taken adversatively — "but are unwilling to hear thee." — Calvin

receive it so, the passage will be defective; for they understand , *am*, “*again*,” “*afterwards*,” for these two words, - , *am-la*, have the force of an oath interposed. What sense then shall we extract from the words, “*truly* I will send thee unto them, and they shall hear thee?” We see then this sense to be too forced. Some explain the passage thus: “If I had not sent thee unto them, they would have heard thee,” as if God here blamed the disposition of the people, because they rather sought vain and foolish prophecies; than submitted themselves to the truth; just as if he had said, if any impostor should pour darkness upon them, they would immediately embrace his fables and lies, as they are so prone to foolishness. Since, therefore, I send thee, therefore they do not hear. But this explanation does not suit, because a little afterwards we shall see it in its own place. To me therefore this context is most probable, *if I had not sent thee to them, these also would have heard thee*, as if it had been said, unless a difference of speech had interposed, I had rather have used thine assistance with reference to foreign nations. In this way God signifies his displeasure, when he says, that he would rather send his Prophet hither and thither than to the Israelites, except through the want of a common language; for this difference of language presented the only boundary to the Prophet, so that he was confined to his own people. In this sense there is nothing forced. *I do not, therefore, send thee to many peoples, profound in speech and strange in tongue, because thou wouldst not understand their language* But if this had not been an obstacle, I would have sent thee, and they would have heard thee. We see then what I have just touched upon, that the Israelites are compared to foreign or uncircumcised tribes, because they rejected the instruction offered them, not through ignorance of the language, but through the hardness of their heart. Isaiah also says, (Isaiah 28:11, 13,) that the word of God would be deep and obscure to even the Jews themselves, but in another sense; he also compares his prophecies to a sealed book, since God had blinded them according to their deserts. Since therefore they were so given over to a reprobate mind, and were destitute of sound understanding, therefore he says, that his teaching would be like a closed and sealed book: then he says, that he would be a barbarian, as if he was using an unknown language. So God in this place clearly shows that the house of Israel were suffering no impediment in profiting by his word, except their own unwillingness to hear. (Isaiah 8:16; Isaiah 29:11.) For he says, that the heathen would be obedient, if they could be partakers of such a benefit. Unless therefore the language of the Prophet had been unknown to the profane and uncircumcised heathen, he had there found attentive and obedient disciples, as God testifies. How then comes it to pass that the house of Israel cannot hear! It now follows, *But the house of Israel are unwilling to hear*, that is, the house of Israel is unwilling to hear thee, because it will not hear me, says he.

Now, therefore, we clearly see the sloth of the people assigned as a reason why they purposely rejected the Word of God, and hardened themselves in obstinacy. He also ascends higher, and says, that the people were not only disobedient to the Prophet but to God himself, as Christ also when he exhorts his disciples to perseverance in teaching. Therefore, says he, they will not hear you, because they will not hear me, and why am I and my teaching hated by them, unless because they do not receive my Father? (John 15:18.) For this stumblingblock is likely to break the spirits of the pious, when they see their teaching so proudly rejected. This reproach alone, therefore, is often accustomed to recall the servants of God from their course: but this admonition is proposed to them in the midst, that God himself is despised. Why then should they take it ill, that they are held in the same estimation as God, who is himself rejected? They think themselves undeserving of such contempt and haughtiness being thrown upon their labor. But is not God worthy of being listened to before all angels? Since, then, they are proud and unbelieving towards God himself, it is not

surprising that they do not reverently receive what is proposed to them by mortal man. Now, therefore, we see what the intention of God is when he says, *the house of Israel will not hear thee, because they do not hear me*: lest it should be vexatious to the Prophet to see his labor profitless, nay, even the children of Israel rising against him: because he ought to bear it patiently, if he should suffer the same obloquy which they did not hesitate to display against the Almighty himself. It follows, *Because the whole house of Israel is of a bold or a daring aspect, and of a hard heart* He repeats what we saw before, but in other words — namely, that the people's hardness of heart was untameable, and that they were not only obstinate in heart but brazen in countenance, so that they cast aside all modesty; and lastly, he implies that their obstinacy was desperate, when he joins a brazen countenance with a hard heart.

Ezekiel 3:8-9

8. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. **8.** Ecce posui facies tuas (faciem tuam) duram contra facies ipsorum, et frontem tuam duram contra frontem ipsorum.

9. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. **9.** Tanquam adamantem fortiolem lapide (vel saxo) posui frontem tuam, ne timeas ipsos, et non dismayed at their looks, though they be a frangaris a fade (vel a praesentia ipsorum) quia domus rebellionis sunt.⁷⁰

Ezekiel was forewarned of the obstinacy of the people, yea, even of their desperate *wickedness*. Now God strengthens him lest he should despair when he saw that he must contend with such abandoned and reckless men; for what else was it than contending with stones? If Ezekiel had been commanded to strike a mountain, it would have been just the same as contending with such a people. He had need then of this strengthening, viz., *his forehead should be adamant against the hardness of the people* If he had hoped for more fruit from his labor, perhaps that facility had been the cause of negligence: for confidence makes us more remiss when the work in hand is neither laborious nor difficult. The Prophet, therefore, would have been colder, if, certainly persuaded that the people would be docile, he had approached them more carelessly. God, therefore, excites him when he speaks of their obstinacy. As then it was useful that the Prophet should comprehend how arduous was the duty to the discharge of which he was called, so also he ought to be armed with the strength of God, for otherwise he would have been easily overcome by its difficulty. This is the reason why God adds, *that he had given him a stout front and a brazen aspect against the face and front of the people* Besides, in this way he was admonished that fortitude was to be hoped for from some other quarter, that he might not spend his strength in vain, but allow himself to be governed by the Spirit of God. For when we think only on the quality and quantity of our own powers, they may easily flow away, and disperse, and even become vapid, unless we discharge our duty with manliness. God, therefore, recalls his Prophet when he says, *that he had given him a face*, as if he would say, that the Prophet did not make war in his own strength, but was armed with celestial virtue. Although,

70

- *meri-hemeh*, a word which we have formerly discussed. — Calvin.

therefore, this seems to have been spoken once for Ezekiel's private use, yet it belongs to us all. Let us learn, then, when God calls us to the office of teaching, never to measure the effect of our work by the standard of our own capacity, nor yet to consider our own powers, but to repose on some communicated strength which God here extols in no empty praises. Whoever, therefore, shall acknowledge that God is sufficient for overcoming all obstacles, will gird himself bravely for his work; but he who delays for calculating his own strength is not only weakened but is almost overcome. Besides, we see that we are here instructed in humility and modesty, lest we should claim anything as due to our own strength. Hence it happens, that many are so full, yea so puffed out with confidence, that they bring forth nothing but wind. Hence, let us learn to seek from God alone that fortitude which we need: for we are not stronger than Ezekiel, and if he needed to be strengthened by the Spirit of God, much more do we at this time need it.

Lastly, we gather from this passage that although the whole world should rise up against the servants of God, yet his strength would be superior, as we saw it was with Jeremiah: They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail. (Jeremiah 1:19; Jeremiah 15:20.) Hence there is no reason why we should be afraid of the violent attack of any enemy, and although the whole world should be in a tumult, yet we need not tremble, because God's strength in us will always be more powerful. Therefore it is added, *as an adamant, harder than flint, have I placed thee; therefore do not fear them*. God says *I have placed the forehead of the Prophet like adamant*; not that he strove with the people by either injustice or audacity, but *because* God opposed the confidence with which Ezekiel was endowed to the furious impudence of the people. In this sense then *the forehead of the Prophet* is said to be *adamant*. Now he adds — *do not fear, then, and do not be broken by their face or presence*. These phrases, that the Prophet *be not broken*, and *yet fear not*, seem to be opposed to each other, since he excels in unconquered fortitude. But God so tempers his favor, that the faithful always have need of excitements, even when he animates them, and supplies them with strength. God, therefore, so works within his servants, that they do nothing except as they are ruled by his Spirit; and yet they have need of his teaching, since his exhortations to them are never superfluous. Profane men think that there is no use in teaching, and that all exhortations are frivolous, if God, when he acts upon us by his Spirit, not only begins, but continues and perfects his own work. But the Scripture shows that these two things mutually agree; for while God strengthens us and renders us unconquerable by his Spirit, at the same time he breathes virtue into his exhortations, and causes them to flourish within us, and to bring forth fruit. In this way God on his part confirms his Prophet, by giving him an adamantine forehead and more than stony, and by giving him an unconquered spirit, and yet he exhorts him to fear not. We see, then, how God governs his own people within them, and yet adds teaching as an instrument of his Spirit. Then he adds, *because they are a rebellious house*, or although they are; for the particle *ki*, is often put adversatively, as we have said elsewhere. If we take it in its proper sense, it will suit very well, *because they are a rebellious house*; as if it had been said, the Prophet has no cause for fear, because he was carefully admonished beforehand, and nothing new could happen; for we are accustomed to be very much frightened by novelty; but when we have meditated on what happens, we are not disturbed, neither do we stand still nor hesitate; for although the Prophet had already learnt that *the house of Israel was rebellious*, yet he perseveres, because he experiences nothing new or unusual. It follows —

Ezekiel 3:10-11

10. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, **10.** Et dixit mihi, Fili hominis, omnes all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive sermones meos quos loquor ad te sime in corde in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. tuo, et auribus tuis audi.

11. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, **11.** Et vade (ingredere) ad transmigrationem, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto ⁷¹ ad filios populi tui, et loquere ad ipsos: et dic them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD, illis: sic dicit Dominator Iehovah, sive audiverint whether they will hear, or whether they will sire cessaverint. forbear.

This is a repetition of the same doctrine; for we said that our Prophet is more verbose than Isaiah, and even than Jeremiah, because he had accustomed himself to the form of speech which was then customary among the exiles, he is not, therefore, either so restricted or so polished; but we must understand that he accommodated his language to learners, because he had to do with a people not only rude and dull, but also obstinate. And then they had degenerated as much from the purity of their language as from that of their faith; hence the Prophet purposely bends aside from elegance of language. Whatever repetition he might use with men so dull and slothful, it was not superfluous. He says, therefore, what we have formerly seen, *that he was commanded to speak all the words*, but he previously says, *that he was commanded to receive them in his heart, and to perceive them with his ears*. The order is inverted, because we must perceive with the ear before we receive in the heart. And they philosophize with more subtlety than truth who say, that the interior hearing precedes, inasmuch as the ears are struck by the sound in vain, unless the heart was already docile. For although God prepares his elect for hearing, and gives them ears for that purpose, yet his teaching does not penetrate to their minds before it has been received by the ear. There is no doubt, then, that here one thing is put before the other, by what we call a ὅστερον πρότερον. The result is, that; the Prophet, as he is sure of his calling, hears God speaking to him. But this was not said for his sake, but that he might securely boast himself to be a servant of God, and bring forward nothing but what he had heard from the mouth of God himself. As, therefore, in this confidence, he was to contend against the people's impiety, so he was commanded *to hear the words of God*. We hear, then, a repetition of what we formerly saw, namely, that the Prophet freely boasts that he did not bring forward merely windy eloquence, as profane men do, who have no other object than to obtain the applause of men.

The Prophet, therefore, here says, that he was commanded *to receive the words of God in his heart*.

Now it is added, *that he may go and proceed to the captivity, to the children of his own people*. We see, then, that God does not regard the Prophet so much as the Israelites, because they had never willingly yielded to the Prophet when he brought a message by no means pleasing. For nothing could be more sad and hateful to them than to hear threats and curses. Because, then, they had never willingly bent to obedience, he is sent with a testimony that he had learnt what he uttered in God's school; then that he had so learnt from God, that he adds nothing of his own; lastly, that he so

⁷¹ That is, to the captives. — Calvin.

speaks, that; the obstinacy of the people is not *overcome*: *Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, do thou nevertheless go forward* Wherefore? *Thou shalt say, thus saith the Lord*. We have already explained the meaning of this phrase, namely, where we are persuaded that our labor is pleasing to God, although it be useless to men, yet this ought to suffice us, that God has sent us. Then he wishes to try our constancy, lest when we see ourselves laboring in vain, we should cease on that account, instead of being prepared to obey, whatever may happen.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou art desirous that the teaching of thy Prophet should be set before us, so many ages after his death, that we be not either obdurate or rebellious; but may we submit ourselves to thee in all becoming reverence and obedience, that the labor which ended in the condemnation of thine ancient people, through their contumacy, may this day be salutary to us, and may we so follow what thou teachest through him, that we may tend to the goal to which thou callest us, until after finishing our course with perseverance, we may be at length gathered together within thy celestial kingdom, through Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE NINTH.

Ezekiel 3:12

12. Then the Spirit took me up, and I heard **12.** Et sustulit me Spiritus: et audiui post me
behind me a voice of a great rushing, *saying*, *vocem strepitus magni* Benedicta gloria Iehovae
Blessed *be* the glory of the LORD from his place. *e loco suo*.

The Prophet again affirms what we have formerly seen, that God had worked upon his mind by the secret instinct of his own Spirit. Although, therefore, God had exhorted him to fortitude, yet the Prophet shows what he demanded of himself. In short, the Prophet was strong in God, because God implanted his virtue within him. He says, therefore, *that he was raised up by the Spirit*, which only means that the agitation within him was of no avail, unless through heavenly inspiration; so also he ought to be carried beyond himself for the time, that nothing human should appear within him. But more will be said about this hereafter.

He adds, *that he heard a voice of a great rushing*, that is, a sonorous voice, and one different from the usual voice of men: for the, Prophet, by the noise or tumult of the voice, could distinguish it from the usual voice of men. *Blessed*, said it, *be the glory of Jehovah from his own place* We cannot doubt that this benediction was suitable to the occasion of its utterance: when, therefore, this voice was heard, God wished to refute the clamorous voices of the people who thought themselves injured. For we know that the people were querulous, and murmured because they thought themselves treated with greater harshness than they deserved. Hence the glory of God is

opposed to all impious and sacrilegious blasphemies, which the Israelites were in the habit of vomiting forth against God, as if he treated them cruelly. In short, this voice restrained all calumnies, by which the impious then endeavored to overwhelm the glory of God. He says *that glory is blessed*, because although men dare not utter gross and open reproaches against God, nevertheless they curse his glory as often as they detract from his justice, and accuse him of too much rigor. Hence, in opposition to this, *a voice is heard, saying, the glory of God is blessed*

By *God's place*, I understand the Temple. I confess that in many passages of Scripture heaven is so called; not that God's essence, which is immense, can be included within any place; for as heaven is called his throne or seat, so also the earth is his footstool, because he fills all things with his immensity. So here, as often in other places, the Temple is called God's place, because he dwelt there with respect to men. Besides, this is said as well with reference to the exiles as to the rest of the people yet remaining at Jerusalem. For the exiles did not sufficiently consider that they were banished from their country, and dragged into a distant region, through the just vengeance of God. Since, therefore, this captivity did not sufficiently subdue them, the name of God ought to be set before them, that they might know that they were not banished from their country by the cruelty of their enemies, but by the judgment of God. The Prophet, doubtless, regards also those Jews who as yet remained at home: for they boasted that God was seated in the Temple, and so fancied that they should be always safe under his protection. But the Prophet, as we shall afterwards see, denounces on those who remained a punishment similar to that of those who were in captivity. It is then just as if he had said that God remained in his Temple, that he might shine there with conspicuous glory. Now as he wished to humble the ten tribes as well as the other two, so he wished to alleviate the grief of them all, that they should not cease to hope for the promised return. For calamity itself might lead them to despair, and to suppose their salvation impossible: nay, to think that God was as it were dead, and his virtue extinct. To what purpose, then, was the worship of God? to what purpose the splendor and dignity of the Temple, unless that God should protect his own? But they had been deserted by him; here then was matter for despair, unless it had been met: the Prophet now treats this, since on one side he reminds them that God was the just avenger of wickedness, when he suffered the ten tribes to be dragged into exile, yet that he would be their deliverer, because he does not cease to reign in his Temple, although profane men think him conquered, and treat with wanton insolence their own triumphs over him. Now therefore we perceive the sense of the Prophet: for this sentence would be cold if it were merely general; but when it is accommodated to the state of things at the time, we see that the glory of God is not extolled by any vain eulogium, and that the Temple is not mentioned in vain. (Psalm 11:4; Psalm 103:19; Isaiah 66:1.)

Ezekiel 3:13

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| <p>13. <i>I heard</i> also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the</p> | <p>13. Et vocem ⁷² alarum animalium osculantium cujusque ad sociam: et vocem rotarum e regione ipsorum, vocem (inquam) strepitus magni.</p> |
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noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing.

The Prophet now seems to express from whence the voice which he heard proceeded: for I do not think that the voice proceeded from any other quarter, and that afterwards the living creatures moved in unison with the wheels, but it seems to me to explain what would otherwise have been doubtful, namely, that God's glory was celebrated by the living creatures and the wheels. It is not wonderful then that a voice should be attributed to the living creatures, because we saw them to be cherubim or angels, as by the wheels God wishes to mark all actions and motions; motions, I say, which seem fortuitous, but yet are governed by the living creatures, whom God inspires with his own virtue, while he wishes to execute his designs, and so exercises his dominion over all creatures; for nothing happens which is not governed by his will. Hence a voice proceeds as well from the living creatures as from the wheels, which extolled the glory of God, and proclaimed him, in the midst of that sad and wretched slaughter of the people, still reigning in his own Temple; then, indeed, especially exercising his power, because he was a judge, in punishing their wickedness; then because he was about to become the deliverer of his own people, as he had promised them restoration after seventy years. He says also, *I heard the voice of wings when they mutually embraced each other*; for , *nekesh*, signifies to embrace: others translate, when they struck or engaged in conflict with each other: but by the word osculating, conjunction is metaphorically signified. When, therefore, *each wing embraced its fellow*, then the voice emerged: he adds also the same thing concerning the wheels, and at length he repeats what he had said, *that there was a sound of a great rushing* It follows —

Ezekiel 3:14

14. So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my profectus sum amarus pro indignatione spiritus spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon mei, et manus Iehovae super me fortis. me.

He confirms what we have formerly seen, namely, that he was acted upon by the Spirit of God, so that it was in some way without himself, and not as profane men have invented, enthusiastically: for their Prophets were deprived of self-control, and the devil so dealt with them, that they were not of sound mind. Hence the Prophet does not understand that he was deprived of self-control, because God's Prophets were of a sedate and composed mind; but he understands that he was so governed by the Spirit of God, that he was unlike himself, and did not breathe a terrestrial air; lastly, he understands that visible marks were graven upon him, which obtained for his doctrine authority with all the people. And it was the more necessary that the Prophet should be adorned with his own proofs, on account of the dullness of the people, and also because his message was distasteful to

⁷² Jerome rightly shows us that it is repeated — ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινου “Therefore I heard a voice.” — Calvin.

them, and he had not previously discharged the duty of a teacher. It was needful, therefore, that he should be so renewed that the *people* should acknowledge him as inspired. He had lived familiarly among his friends, and was sufficiently known both by appearance and character. Meanwhile God, as I have said, separated him from common life, that he should represent something celestial; and the object of this was, as we have shown, to *conciliate* confidence and reverence towards his teaching. He felt indeed the agitation of the Spirit, and it is scarcely to be doubted that the people also knew it, otherwise they would scarcely have had *confidence* in him when speaking of himself.

The object of this remarkable government of the Spirit was, that the Israelites, if only awake and attentive to the miracle, might know the Prophet to be in some manner renovated. But what follows seems opposed to the former sentence; for he says (Ezekiel 3:3) the volume was sweet as honey, but now *that he departed in the bitterness of his spirit*; but as I briefly explained yesterday, this is easily reconciled; for the Prophet was not deprived of all sensation. Although he was entirely consecrated to God, and in no degree remitted his diligence and alacrity, yet he retained some human feelings: hence the spirit of bitterness of which he speaks, which he calls *his own spirit*. Whence we perceive an implied contrast between that motion by which he was caught up and that feeling, which, although not sinful, was in some way different from the grace of the Spirit, because the Prophet so burnt with zeal that he performed the commands of God almost in forgetfulness of self: yet, at the same time, he felt within him something human, since the power of the Spirit had not extinguished all sorrow. We hold, therefore, that the Prophet was in some degree inspired by the Spirit, and yet that *his own spirit was bitter*. He adds, *and the hand of Jehovah was strong upon me*. By “hand,” some understand prophecy, but in my opinion ignorantly: I do not doubt that its meaning is power or authority. He says, *the hand of God was strong*, because he ought to obey God, although the bitterness of which he spoke should draw him in a contrary direction. As Paul says, (2 Corinthians 5:14, and Philippians 1:23,) that he was constrained by a zeal of God, so also the Prophet signifies that he was constrained by the secret instinct of the Spirit, so that he did not act from human motives, nor yet obey the wishes of his own mind, nor follow his own individual will, but was only intent on rendering obedience to God. In this sense, then, he says, *that the hand of God was strong upon him*. Otherwise it might be objected — why did he not fall away when he was so oppressed with grief, and anxiety so overwhelmed his spirit? he replies, the hand of God was strong and prevailed, since otherwise he would have failed a hundred times, had he not been supported by the power of God. And thus we see that there was some repugnance in the Prophet, since as man he was affected with sorrow, but the power of the Holy Spirit ruled over him, so that he denied himself and all his human affections.

Ezekiel 3:15

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| <p>15. Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.</p> | <p>15. Et veni ad transmigrationem⁷³ in Thelabib: sedebant⁷⁴ autem prope flumen Chebar: illic ipsi sedebant; et sedi etiam illic septem diebus, obstupescens⁷⁵ in medio ipsorum.</p> |
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Now he says, that he had returned to his own people, not that he had ever removed from them, but had been drawn by the vision from the intercourse with men. For God revealed himself to him on the bank of the river Chebar, but he was solitary: and that this was done by vision, is by no means doubtful, since he was always among his own people. How then does he say, *that he is now returned?* Why, because the vision had vanished, and so he was entirely occupied with the other captives. What some affirm with subtlety, that he was like a monk, is frivolous: for they say, that he abhorred the wickedness of the people, and, that he might not contract any stain of impurity, had sought solitude: but this is not probable. Without doubt, the Prophet means that he returned to his former mode of life from the time when he heard God speaking and saw the vision. He then says — *I sat seven days* in some way absorbed in either admiration or sorrow, for , *shemew*, signifies “to be desolate,” “to be astonished,” “to wonder.” But as to the Prophet *sitting quiet and silent for seven days*, there is little doubt but that in this way God prepared him for beginning to speak afterwards to the greater surprise of the whole people. Nor ought it to seem absurd that he was dumb although sent by God:: for this did not occur through any negligence or delay which can be accounted a fault, but the office of teaching had been so imposed that he was not yet instructed by any fixed commands; as if any one were chosen ambassador either by a king or a senate, and were afterwards furnished with his instructions, so the Prophet was called to the prophetic office., but knew not yet what he was to say. He had indeed eaten the roll, but God had not yet suggested whence he ought to begin, nor how he ought to temper his doctrine. Hence Ezekiel had not yet been drawn forth: therefore he says, that he sat with either great stupor or great desolation, as they say. For his very appearance would rouse the attention of men, that they should enquire the meaning of this unusual sorrow. Whatever it was, we see that this silence was a preparation for the discharge of his duty with greater fruit and efficacy, since his speech ought afterwards to be received with greater reverence *when he had been silent for seven days*

Then he says, *I came to the exiles who sat in Thelabib* I willingly accord with the opinion of those who take this for the name of a place, and ancient interpreters even have left these two words. Their Septuagint version has μετέωρον, as if it meant “lofty.” , *thelel*, signifies to elevate, but it ought to be , *thelol*, if the Prophet meant that he was exalted, but this is not suitable, since he rather asserts that he was like the rest of mankind after the vision was withdrawn. Some render it “*skillful*,” but I am not aware of their reason: but as I have already said, their opinion is probable, who suppose it the proper name of a place. Jerome translates, “a heap of fruit,” and not badly; for this was probably the origin of the place’s name, as cities and villages and mountains often receive their name from their situation and other circumstances; so also this place was called Thelabib. For , *thel*, signifies “a heap,” and , *abib*, means a “stalk,” or “straw of corn,” and it may, therefore,

⁷³ That is, to the captives. — Calvin.

⁷⁴ Literally, the passing over of those sitting — Calvin.

⁷⁵ Or, desolate — Calvin.

be that the place was called Thelabib on account of its fertility, since the harvest there is very plentiful. But this is of no great moment. What we have mentioned must be especially remembered, that the Prophet was beheld in that sad and sorrowful countenance, *and was silent for seven days*

Ezekiel 3:16-17

16. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, ⁷⁶ **16.** Et accidit a fine septem dierum ⁷⁶ factus saying, sermo Iehovae ad me, dicendo.

17. Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. **17.** Fili hominis, speculatorem posui ⁷⁸ to domui Israel: audies ergo ex ore meo sermones, et admonebis illos ex me.

Now the Prophet shows more clearly why he continued in silence for seven days, because, indeed, he had been appointed a teacher, but the time had not fully arrived in which he was to utter the commands of God. He waited, therefore until he should receive a distinct message. Hence he says, *at the end of seven days I received a word from the Lord* Whence we gather, that he had been chosen before, and that the burden of an embassy was imposed upon him: meanwhile he stood, as it were, in suspense, because he did not distinctly understand what he was to say, and where he ought to begin. Hence it appears, that God acts by degrees towards his servants, so that he claims them for his own, then he shows them generally what duties and labors they have to discharge, and at length he sends them forth to the performance of their work, and the execution of their office. This we see was done in the case of our Prophet. For first he learned that he was chosen by God, afterwards he was admonished generally to behave himself courageously, and not to yield to any threats or terrors: at length God explained to him what commands he wished him to bear to the people. As yet God seems to speak but generally, but it is as if he announced that the time had come when the Prophet must gird himself to his work: hence he says, *Son of man I have appointed thee a watchman of the house of Israel*

What Ezekiel heard belongs to all teachers of the Church, namely, that they are Divinely appointed and placed as on watch-towers, that they may keep watch for the common safety of all. It was the duty of those who have been appointed from the beginning ministers of the heavenly doctrine to be watchmen. And would that in the Papacy, as this name has been imposed on idols, dumb and blind and deaf, those who with swelling cheeks call themselves Bishops, had been admonished of their vocation. For we know that the word Bishop means the same as watchman. But when they were boasting themselves to be bishops, they were drowned in the darkness of gross ignorance: then also they were buried in their pleasure, as well as in sloth, for there is no more intelligence in these animals than in oxen or asses. Asses and oxen do spend their labor for the advantage of man, but these are not only destitute of all judgment and reason, but are altogether

⁷⁶ That is, "after seven days." — Calvin.

⁷⁷ Happened or occurred, for the same word is variously repeated. — Calvin.

⁷⁸ Or. appointed. — Calvin.

useless. But what I have said is to be remembered, when God chooses Prophets, that they are placed, as it were, on watch-towers, that they may keep watch for the safety of the whole Church. This ought now to have its force, that pastors may acknowledge themselves placed in stations whence they may be watchful: and this, indeed, is one point. Now this cannot be done unless they are endued with superior gifts and prevail in the grace of the Spirit above the commonalty. Nor is it sufficient that pastors should live as private men, but they ought to wait longer, as if they were placed on a lofty watchtower, which demands both diligence and a power of observation: this is a second point.

It is now added, *thou shalt hear words from my mouth, and shalt announce them to the people from me*. Here a general rule is prescribed to all Prophets and pastors of the Church, namely, that they should hear the word from the mouth of God: by which particle God wishes to exclude whatever men fabricate or invent for themselves. For it is evident, when God claimed to himself the right of speaking that he orders all men to be silent and not to offer anything of their own, and then, when he orders them *to hear the word from his mouth*, that he puts a bridle upon them that they should neither invent anything, nor hanker after their own devices, nor dare to conceive either more or less than the word: and, lastly, we see that whatever men offer of their own selves, is here abolished, when God alone wishes to be heard, for he does not mingle himself here with others as in a crowd, as if he wished to be heard only in part. He assumes to himself, therefore, what we ought to attribute to his supreme command over all things, namely, that we should hang upon his lips. But if this was said to Ezekiel, how is it that men of no authority now dare to spread abroad their own fictions, as we see done in the Papacy? for what is such a religion but a confused jumble of the numberless fictions of men? dray have heaped together, from many brains, an immense chaos of errors; 'for they wish us to adore as the oracles of God whatever foolish men have imagined. But who among them will boast himself superior to Ezekiel? nay, if they were all put together will they dare to assert that they can be compared with him alone? And if they dare, who will admit their arrogance? We see then, that Ezekiel with the other Prophets is reined in, that he should not say anything but what he has heard from God's mouth.

Now it follows, *thou shalt admonish them from me* The word which the Prophet uses, signifies as well to admonish as to caution. There is no doubt that he means those admonitions by which men are roused to caution, lest they should perish through any error or thoughtlessness. Hence after God had subjected the Prophet to himself, and commanded him to be a disciple, he appointed him a teacher, because hearing was not sufficient, unless he who had been called to rule the Church should deliver out of his hand what he had received from God. God therefore commands his Prophet to speak, after he had ordered him to hear. But he adds, *from me*, that the people may understand that God alone is the author of instruction. False teachers, indeed, proudly assume the name of God, as we see in the Papacy that this axiom sounds through it, that the Church is ruled by the Holy Spirit immediately, and therefore that it cannot err: but these two things are to be read conjointly, namely, that he who is appointed a teacher should hear God speaking, and afterwards should admonish in the name of God himself, that is, should profess that he is the minister and witness of God, so that his teaching should not be thought his own. For those who affect the praise of ability, or learning, or eloquence, often obscure the name of God, and therefore although they professed that they had their teaching from God, yet afterwards they speak from themselves: that is, they puff themselves up with vain ostentation, so that the majesty of God does not appear, nor the efficacy of the Spirit in that profane method of teaching. Hence God afterwards imposed a law upon his Prophet, that he should utter nothing but what he had heard: now he adds another clause: *that he*

should admonish the people; but he must admonish them not from himself, but must always have in his mouth that sacred name of God, and show that he is in reality sent from him. For after this manner spake Moses, What am I and my brother Aaron? (Numbers 16:11.) Here we see that Moses spake from God; that is, professed himself to be God's minister, when he bore witness that he was nothing, that he assumed nothing to himself, and acted in nothing by his own peculiar counsel or motion.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou condescendest to interest thyself in our salvation, and stirrest up thy servants to be to us instead of eyes, that we may know thy watchfulness over us lest we perish, — grant, I pray thee, that we may be so roused by the holy admonitions which flow from thee through their ministry and service, that if we have turned aside from the right way we may speedily return to it, and so go forward in our course, and be endued with such perseverance, that we may at length arrive at the fruition of that blessed rest, which has been obtained for us by the blood of thy Son. Amen.

LECTURE TENTH.

Ezekiel 3:18

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| <p>18. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor admonueris ipsum, et non locutus fueris ad eum, speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked admonendum impium a via sua impia, ad way, to save his life; the same wicked <i>man</i> shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.</p> | <p>18. Cum dixero impio, morte morieris, et non vivificandum ipsum: impius ipse in iniquitate sua morietur: sanguinem vero ejus e manu tua requiram.</p> |
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The Prophet is now taught how difficult and dangerous an office he has now to undertake. God had previously laid it down as a law that he should utter nothing of himself: now he adds, that, the watchman is so set over the people that he must render an account of the diligence with which he goes through his watches. It is just as if it had been said that souls were committed to his care and fidelity, so that if they should perish he must undergo punishment before God. But it is better to explain the words — if *when I say to the impious, "Thou shalt surely die," and thou dost not admonish him, and he perish, then from thee will I require his blood* In the first place, God confirms what we saw yesterday, that it is not permitted to any mortal to condemn or absolve at his own discretion. When, therefore, God sends forth his servants, he does not resign that power, for still the supreme authority remains with himself: because there is one lawgiver, as James says, who can save and destroy. (James 4:12; Ezekiel 13:19.) And elsewhere Ezekiel reproves the false prophets,

because they keep alive the souls which were dying, and slay the souls not devoted to death. For we know that proud men always tyrannize over the conscience when they take upon themselves the prophetic name, and substitute themselves in the place of God, as their practice is in the Papacy. For the Pope indeed pretends that he does nothing in his own proper name, but meanwhile he claims the prerogative of God, and sits in the temple as an idol, because nothing is more peculiar to God than ruling our minds with celestial doctrine; but the Papists themselves heap on their own comments, and so it comes to pass that they miserably distort and drown their own consciences even to utter destruction. They enact laws according to their pleasure, then they always add the condition, that they must be kept under pain of eternal damnation, or of mortal sin, as they say. This place, then, must be diligently marked, where God claims to himself alone the power and right of condemning: *if, says he, when I say to the impious*. From this we infer, that all those are sacrilegious who bind consciences with their own laws, decrees, and enactments, enforcing one thing and forbidding another, because they take away from God what here he wishes to be assigned to him, for it is his office alone to pronounce sentence, for Prophets are only his heralds.

Meanwhile those fanatics are to be rejected, who, under pretext of this place, wish to give license to sin, and assert there is no difference between good and evil, because it is not our duty to condemn. For, properly speaking, we do not assume anything to ourselves when we recite what has proceeded from the mouth of God. God condemns adulterers, thieves, drunkards, murderers, enviers, slanderers, oppressors: if one inveigh against an adulterer, another a thief, a third a drunkard, shall we say that they take upon themselves more than they ought? By no means, because they do not pronounce of themselves as we have said, but God has said it, and they are but witnesses and messengers of his sentence. Yet this moderation must be maintained, not to condemn any one through moroseness, since many immediately abominate whatever displeases them, and cannot be induced to use diligent inquiry. Inquiry, therefore, should precede our sentences; but when God has spoken, then we must follow the rule which was given to the Prophet, *if thou hast not admonished him, and spoken for his admonition*. Here the character which was imposed upon Ezekiel is referred to: for the same duty does not devolve upon private individuals who do not bear the prophetic name. For we must remark that this is not a general declaration which concerns all men at large, but it concerns a Prophet who had already been called to be a watchman: for unless those who sustain such a burden admonish mankind, no excuse remains for them but the necessity of sending an account to God for those who are lost. And the repetition shows that this ought not to be done as a matter of course, but that Prophets ought to be anxious and even zealous in recalling sinners. This clause was clear enough: *if thou dost not admonish the wicked after I have spoken*: but it is added, *and hast not spoken for his admonition*. This sentence seems to be repeated in vain, but God signifies that, unless the Prophet admonishes sinners, he is not absolved, because he spoke once in passing and uttered but a single word. We should remember that sinners ought to be continually reprov'd that they may return to the right way. And this is the tendency of Paul's doctrine to Timothy:

“be instant in season and out of season.” (2 Timothy 4:2.)

For if it had been sufficient to reprove sinners mildly, and afterwards to spare them, Paul would have been content with that courtesy, but he says, we must be urgent on every occasion. The minister of the Church then must not cease to repeat these admonitions, as Paul says elsewhere to the Philippians —

“I am not weary of repeating the same things to you.”
(Philippians 3:18.)

And we know what he professes in the Acts. (Acts 20:31.) I have not ceased day and night, publicly and privately, to admonish each of you. That perseverance then which Paul shows that he used is here enjoined on all the Prophets and servants of God.

He says, *to urge him to turn from his evil way*, that is, to be cautious; as it was said yesterday, *zeher*, means to be cautious; here it is taken *actively* — *unless thou hast spoken, that thou mayest teach him to be cautious, or to return from his evil way* Here it may be asked, why does God touch only on one side of the teaching, and omit the chief point? For why was the law given? and why were Prophets called forth, unless to collect the people for God? Here we must exercise the obedience of faith, since we know that God regards nothing as more important than uniting miserable men in the hope of eternal life. This is the chief end of the law and the gospel, that men being reconciled to God, may worship him as a Father. Chastisements, threats, and terrors follow afterwards, of which now there is only the mention; but we must consider the condition of the people, as we have already seen it; for at that time the prevalence of impiety, and contempt of God, and of all kinds of wickedness, was so great, that the Prophet could not address the people mildly and softly. Since, indeed, that passage of Paul must be remembered, (1 Corinthians 4:21,) what will ye? how shall I come to you? with a rod, or in the spirit of mildness? When he gives the Corinthians the choice, whether they wish him to come in a spirit of tenderness, or armed with a rod for their chastisement — and why? For when they were self-satisfied with their sins, Paul could not, according to his custom, treat them as sons, nor deal freely with them, but he was compelled to assume, as it were, another character, and to use pure austerity and rigor. Such, then, were the Israelites, and hence we cannot feel surprise that God should lay aside his pity, his promises of favor, and whatever is sweet and pleasant to men; for they were not in a fit state to hear the paternal voice of God, unless previously subdued; and this could not be done without violence, because of their exceeding perverseness.

Hence we must remark, that the more displeasing the Prophets' embassy, the greater need they had of excitements; because, if the grace of God only is to be set before a people, and the hope of eternal life to be held out to them, since there is nothing in such teaching which greatly offends them, or embitters their feelings, hence it is easy to offer freely messages of this kind. But when men are to be summoned, or rather dragged, to the tribunal of God, when they are to be frightened by the fear of eternal death, when the minister, in the armory of God, as Paul says, (2 Corinthians 10:5-7,) brings his vengeance before mankind, because offense is thus stirred up, and this sometimes instigates men to fury, because, they cannot bear thus to be pressed home with the word of God; hence it is necessary that Prophets themselves should be animated, lest they fail, or even hesitate in their duty. Now, therefore, we understand why God speaks only of his own threats and terrors, for he mingles no taste of pity, because, in truth, the Israelites were not capable of profiting by any mildness, so that the Prophet would never have dared to discharge his duty so courageously unless this threat had been added. In other places we shall see the Prophet as God's ambassador, for reconciling the miserable exiles to God; for he will bring forward many testimonies concerning the reign of Christ, and the restoration of the Church, and will herald the mercy and pardon of God; but before he can utter any message of grace, he must himself contend with the extreme obstinacy of the people. Hence it is, therefore, that God only can say, *that the impious must be admonished, that they may return from their impiety*

It is added, *to give them life*; and this may seem absurd, because all hope of repentance was taken away beforehand; they are a rebellious house and a bitter one, thou wilt not profit them.

(Ezekiel 2:5, 6, 8.) But it now seems that the fruit of his labor is promised, when mention is made of the life of those who, when admonished, shall repent. But in the first place we must remember, that some individuals always are curable, even if the whole body of the people appears desperate. For God, when he previously said that all the Israelites were rebellious and intractable, referred to the body at large, but as he is accustomed to preserve some small seed, there were a few remaining in that people who might be converted by the Prophet's labor. This is one point. Besides, we must remember, even if no success from labor appears, yet it ought to satisfy us, just as if we had succeeded better and according to our wishes. For example, suppose our duty to be with the impious multitude, where-ever we turn our eyes contempt of God meets us, and even such wickedness, that we seem to lose all our pains. But yet, whilst the sin of the people affords us only materials for despair, we ought, nevertheless, to pursue our course, just as if the seed sown were producing fruit. Although, therefore, Ezekiel had heard from God's mouth that the people would be rebellious, yet he ought to spend his labors for God quite as much as if he either perceived or hoped for some good result. In the meantime, what I have touched upon must be borne in mind, namely, that God always has some seed as a remnant, although the people as a whole may be lapsed into impiety.

It is now added, *the impious man shall die in his impiety, but I will require his blood at thy hand*. God here says, that he had called his servant under this condition, that he must render an account if any one perished through his fault. This place, although I have lately touched upon the subject, shows how dangerous an office those sustain who are called to the duty of teaching. Nothing is more precious to God than souls which he has created after his own image, and of which he is both the Redeemer and Father. Since, therefore, our souls and their salvation are so dear to God, hence we infer, how anxiously Prophets and all pastors ought to discharge their duties; for it is just as if God were to commit souls to their care, under this condition of rendering an account of each. Nor is it sufficient to admonish one and another, for unless they had endeavored to recall all from destruction to life and salvation, we hear what God here pronounces. Hence, also, Paul uses this expression, woe is me if I preach not the gospel, for a necessity is laid upon me. (1 Corinthians 9:16.) In fine, that the Prophet may be roused to undertake his office, God here announces that certain penalties hang over him, unless he diligently endeavor to recall all wanderers into the way of salvation. But, because men think that their ignorance will prove a sufficient defense, this cavil is removed, because God says they shall perish, although they were not admonished. This exception is added advisedly, that men may not flatter themselves, and throw the blame upon their pastors, if they perish in error. Although, therefore, any one has not been admonished, yet he shall die, and although the pastor shall render an account of his negligence, and shall spare himself while doing so, yet he shall have no excuse before God. Now we perceive that negligence in Prophets and pastors is allied to perfidy, when they knowingly and willingly permit souls to perish through their own silence: meanwhile, it is not surprising if God adjudges to death those who are not admonished: for their conscience is a sufficient accuser, and however they may now defend their error and ignorance, it is certain that they perish of their own accord. Afterwards it follows —

Ezekiel 3:19

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| <p>19. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.</p> | <p>19. Et tu si (quod st) admonueris impium et non fuerit conversus ab impietate sua, a via sua impia, ipse in sua iniquitate morietur: tu vero animam tuam liberasti.</p> |
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The Prophet is here taught how usefully he will lay out his labor, although he should appear to fail, for he ought to be satisfied with this alone, that God approves his efforts. Although, therefore, those who were to be brought back by holy exhortations remain obstinate, yet God's servants ought not, through fastidiousness, to throw up their commission as if it were useless, for they free their own souls. It has been formerly said, that a necessity was imposed upon them, but if they are dumb dogs the destruction of souls will be imputed to them, but when they have executed their duty and satisfied the Almighty, ought not it to suffice them to be absolved in his opinion? We see then, that the Prophet was animated by this consolation, lest he should be weary of admonishing abandoned and obstinate men, because, if they were not profited by his teaching, yet its fruit should return to himself. That expression of Christ's is well known, "Into whatsoever house ye enter, salute it: if the house be unworthy, your blessing shall return to yourselves." (Matthew 10:12, 13; Luke 10:5, 6.) So also when the Prophets anxiously desired to reclaim the wandering sheep and to collect them within the fold, if they experienced such petulance that their labor did not profit them, yet their usefulness shall return to themselves. Now we understand the counsel of God in these words, *Thou, therefore, hast freed thy soul*. Here he does not put *impiety* only, but *impious way*, for the sake of explanation: unless any one had rather distinguish that impiety is the interior wickedness of the heart, but an impious way is the outward life and comprehends all actions, which is perhaps more probable, although there is no reason to object to add *impious way* as an explanation after the mention of impiety. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 3:20

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| <p>20. Again, When a righteous <i>man</i> doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and fecerit iniquitatem, et posuero offendiculum I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: coram facie ejus, ⁷⁹ ipse morietur; quia non because thou hast not given him warning, he shall admonueris, in scelere suo morietur, et in die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath memoriam non venient justitiae ejus, quia (quas) done shall not be remembered; but his blood will fecit, sanguinem vero ejus e manu tua requiram. I require at thine hand.</p> | <p>20. Et si justus aversus fuerit a justitia sua, et</p> |
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Here God adds another part of duty which is incumbent on all Prophets. For they are first sent to bring back into the way those who had been alienated from God, then to retain those who are already within the flock, and to lead those onward to the goal who have already entered upon the course. We see, therefore, that Prophets ought to be occupied with both duties, so that they may

⁷⁹ Or, "and then I shall put a stumblingblock before his face." — Calvin.

not only recall to their obedience to God those who wander after their own lusts, but also confirm those who are, of their own accord, teachable already, and encourage them to persevere, and prevent them from failing away. Hence, after God has spoken concerning the correction of sinners who had strayed, he now adds another member. If, says he, *the righteous man be turned aside from his righteousness, and thou hast not admonished him, he shall die, and I will require his blood at thy hand* Where in effect God signifies, that Prophets are guilty, not only if they do not exhort those who have withdrawn from the right way to retrace their steps, but also if they do not retain within their duty those who have already entered upon the right course. We must then have two objects in view, to recall those who have fallen into various errors, and to take care that those within the fold should not fall away, but be strengthened in perseverance. Hence it is now added, *If the righteous shall turn aside, he indeed shall die, but his blood will I require*

Here it may be asked, how can the just turn aside, since there is no righteousness without the spirit of regeneration But the seed of the Spirit is incorruptible, (1 Peter 1:23,) nor can it ever happen that his grace is utterly extinguished; for the Spirit, is the earnest and seal of our adoption, for God's adoption is without repentance, as Paul says. (Romans 11:29.) Hence it may seem absurd to say, *that the just recedes and turns aside from the right way*. That passage of John is well known — if they had been of us, they had remained with us, (1 John 2:19,) but because they have departed, that falling away proves sufficiently that they were never ours. But we must here mark, that *righteousness* is here called so:, which has only the outward appearance and not the root: for when once the spirit of regeneration begins to flourish, as I have said, it remains perpetually. And we shall sometimes see men borne along with a wonderful ardor of zeal for the worship of God, and to be urged to promote his glory beyond even the very best men; indeed we shall see this, but, says Paul, God knows those who are his own. (2 Timothy 2:19.) Hence it is not wonderful that God under the name of righteousness here commends virtues which deserve praise before men, even if they do not spring from a pure fountain. Thus we see it. often happens that the righteous are alienated, *and turn aside from the right way*. This passage, then, ought to stir us up to seek from God continually a spirit of perseverance, because such is our propensity to sin, that we immediately flow in different directions like water, unless God strengthen us. When therefore we see the righteous themselves depart from the way, let us learn and become sure of the constancy of our own faith, only let our confidence be founded on the help of the Holy Spirit and not. in ourselves. In the meantime, we see that Christ did not pronounce this passage in vain: Happy are those who persevere unto the end, (Matthew 24:13,) because many fall away in the midst of their course, or reversing their steps, turn their backs upon God.

Now we must carefully remark what follows, *his righteousness shall not be remembered*, because some desire to bargain with God, so that if for a time they enter upon the pursuit of piety, that may be taken into account and avail in their favor. But we hear what God pronounces, *all their righteousness shall not be remembered in the case of backsliders* There is no encouragement to flatter ourselves into sloth and security, when God shows that unless we continue to the end, even the goal of our career, whatever else we attain unto, it is useless. He says, as clearly as words will express it, *if he shall fall away, or recede, or turn aside from his righteousness and shall commit iniquity* We must mark this diligently, because we know that the very best men often fall away; but here a falling away is intended, where any one casts himself headlong on impiety: hence to commit iniquity is to give oneself up entirely to impiety; as when John says, that those who are born again of the Spirit of God do not commit sin, (1 John 3:9,) he means, are not addicted to sin,

even if as yet they dwell among many infirmities and failings: as also Paul says, that sin dwells in us, but does not reign. (Romans 6:12.) Hence to commit sin is to give oneself up to sin. But God says, *I will place*, or for placing, or if I shall have placed, *a stumblingblock before his face*. Punishment is here called a stumblingblock, when God demonstrates his vengeance against apostates. Although a stumblingblock may also be called actual admonition, as the phrase is; but because that is too far-fetched, I receive it simply, *if the righteous shall have turned aside: but I shall have rendered the reward which he deserved*, he shall die, *because thou hast not admonished him*: in his unrighteousness shall he die: thus I point it off, for interpreters seem to me improperly to have mingled together — he shall die, and — he shall die in his iniquity. Now that threat which we have seen is repeated, namely, that all prophets who have deserted their office are guilty before God, because their sloth differs little from perfidy: for God considered them worthy of the greatest honor, since he committed souls to them, which, as we have said, he esteems so dear and precious. But if they reject this trust committed to them, we see that they not only act injuriously to man, but are also ungrateful to God; and their sluggishness is not only united with perfidy, but also with sacrilege, because they permit Satan to snatch from God what was his own. Just as if any watchman should desert his post and betray it to the enemy; because when they see some wander and others desert, it is clear that this does not arise from ignorance, as we have said, but to the snares of Satan and lust are those exposed whom Christ has redeemed with his blood: hence as we have said, this their treachery is without excuse.

PRAYER,

O Almighty God, grant, that as thou dost appoint the ministers of thy doctrine, whom thou dost raise up, watchmen over us on this condition, that they be vigilant for our safety, — grant that we also may be attentive to their instructions, and avoid a double destruction through our own fault, by error and obstinacy; but if we should happen to wander, may we be wise again immediately we are blamed, and so return into the right way, as never to desert it again, but persevere unto the end, that we may at length enjoy that eternal blessedness which is laid up for us in heaven, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

LECTURE ELEVENTH.

Ezekiel 3:21

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| <p>21. Nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous <i>man</i>, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.</p> | <p>21. Et tu si ipsum admonueris <i>nempe justum</i> ne peccet justus, et ipse non peccaverit, vivendo vivet, quia admonitus fuit: tu vero animam tuam liberasti.</p> |
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We saw in our last lecture that the office of pastors is twofold, that they collect the dispersed sheep, and retain within the fold those whom they had gathered together. For as man's nature is inclined to many failures, it often happens that those who have been gathered into God's sheepfold are dispersed hither and thither, through their own infirmity, unless they are strengthened. For this reason constant admonitions are necessary; and hence God asserts that those pastors will be guilty, if though their negligence the righteous fall away. He now pursues the same sentiment, but adds another clause — *but if the righteous is admonished the shepherd is guiltless*. The whole meaning is this, because Ezekiel had been called to the office of teaching, he ought to be intent in recalling into the way those who have erred, and also in retaining others. In the meanwhile we must observe, that those who seem to have entered on the right way are daily subject to error, unless God retains them by his servants, and urges them to go forward. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 3:22-23

22. And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee. **22.** Et fuit super me illic manus Iehovae et dixit mihi, surge et egredere in planiciem, et illic loquar tecum.

23. Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face. **23.** Et surrexi, et egressus sum in planiciem: et ecce illic gloria Iehovae stetit *stans* sicuti gloria quam conspexeram super flumen Chebar: et cecidi in faciem meam.

God seems in some way to play with his Prophet, when he sends him about, and apparently changes his plan. For the duty of teaching was previously imposed upon the holy man, but now he is commanded to go abroad, and afterwards God orders him to shut himself up at home. Hence this variety seems like a change of plan, when God first commands his servant to speak, and afterwards to be silent. But it is by no means doubtful that, by this method, the authority of the Prophet was confirmed, when God evidently governed his tongue, whether for speech or silence. For although he was created a teacher, yet he restrained himself till God should suggest what he was to say. Afterwards he was ordered to be silent, and obeyed God; then when God dictated words, and commanded him to go forth in public, he began to discharge his office. Now, if he had begun to speak directly upon his appointment, too great levity might be objected against him; but when he showed his alacrity, and yet remained silent during God's pleasure, greater weight was added to his teaching.

Now we understand to what purpose *the hand of God was upon him*. By *the hand of God* his power is understood; for that exposition is cold, as I have before observed, which interprets the hand of God as the prophetic office. He perceives, then, that he was impelled by the secret virtue of God. Lastly, the hand of God is nothing else but the agitation of the Spirit, since the Prophet felt that he was not carried forward by human power, or by any arbitrary impulse, he says, therefore, *the hand of Jehovah was upon me, and he said to me arise, and go forth to the plain, that I may speak there with thee*. Ezekiel could not but suppose that he was led forth to proclaim immediately God's commands to the people. But in this opinion he was mistaken, because, as we shall see, he

was brought forth into the midst that he should immediately shut himself up at home. But before he says this, he says *that he went forth*. We see how submissive he was whenever God sent him. And this is worthy of notice, because unless God's calling please us, and our sense approve ⁸⁰ it, we fly back, or at least put it off. But the Prophet had a just excuse, according to human judgment, for turning his back with some color of reason; for God had often addressed him already, and as yet without fruit. But now, although he is hitherto held in suspense, yet God does not pronounce what he wishes him to do; yet *he goes out into the plain*, because God commanded him. We are taught by this example, even if the result of things is hidden from us, that as soon as God issues any command, we must obey, even if our senses refuse, yet we ought so to obey him as to follow whenever he calls, even if our doing it seems not only in vain, but ridiculous. But God did not address him in vain when he appeared in his glory, for the appearance of the glory of God ought to satisfy a holy man, although all other things should fail. *He saw the glory of God, as it were, near the river Chebar*; whence we gather, that the vision was not fixed to any definite place. God, therefore, appeared once above the bank of the river to his servant, and then in the plain. As to his saying *he fell on his face*, I have previously explained what he means. It must necessarily happen that the faithful, who are impressed with a serious fear of God, should dread his appearance. The impious, also, are compelled to fear God, but afterwards they grow hardened, and although they are rendered almost lifeless, the stupor which follows extinguishes all sensation. But the fear which the faithful feel from the appearance of God is joined with reverence. *Thus also Ezekiel fell on his face*, so as not to rise again until the Spirit raised him up, as it follows afterwards.

Ezekiel 3:24

24. Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house. **24.** Et venit in me spiritus, et statuit me supra pedes meos, et locutus est mecum, et dixit mihi, Vade occludere in medio domus tuae. ⁸¹

Here Ezekiel confirms what I have said: whenever the faithful are frightened at the sight of God's glory, they cannot collect their mind unless the Lord prop them up by his strength. But this state was peculiar to the Prophet, because he ought to acknowledge himself, as it were, dead when he felt the Spirit of God living and flourishing in his mind. Therefore this tends to confirm him, because the Spirit restored him from a state of death to life: therefore he says, *the Spirit came*. In fine, as the soul gives life to the man, so the Spirit of God is a supernatural life in man. We live after the manner of men, because a virtue is implanted in our soul which has faculties of its own. For in the soul is the seat of intelligence, and the will, and the sensations, and it diffuses its vigor through all the members. But the life which souls breathe into bodies is only earthly, but the Spirit of God gives life supernaturally. And this distinction must be held, because profane men boast only in outward appearances, as they call it — that is, in outward splendor, which is nothing else but a

⁸⁰ Calvin's Latin — "Quia nisi nobis arideat Dei vocatio, et sensus noster subscribat." The French is — Pource que si la vocation de Dieu ne nous vient a gre, et que nostre sens l'approuve.

⁸¹ That is, "within thy house." — Calvin.

mask: and so with all their might they celebrate free-will and our natural faculties, because they have never tasted what that supernatural life is which is here mentioned. Ezekiel indeed was filled with the Spirit of God after a peculiar manner, that he might be fit to undertake the prophetic office, but this is common to the faithful for their spiritual life.

He says next, *that he was placed upon his feet*, because he was lying prostrate, nor could he, as I have said, raise a finger, unless he had been raised by divine power. Afterwards he relates the command of God, which appears to be absurd. For why did God appoint Ezekiel a Prophet unless that he should apply himself to the office of teaching? But now he orders him not only to rest, but even to be concealed at home. He uses the word “concealed” as if he had said, remain at home as a captive. If he had been a private man, he had enjoyed a free passage out, but now since God enjoins upon him the prophetic office, he is held captive. But all this is opposed to his mission. But first, God wished to prove the obedience of his servant; then he wished specially to confirm his calling more and more, for this was no common confirmation, because although the Prophet excelled in singular virtue, yet he did not leap into the midst, but rested at home, and became a voluntary captive, because it so pleased God. Hence the whole people might know that the Prophet did not proceed rashly, or by any sudden impulse, because he was often mute by the command of God. Afterwards it follows —

Ezekiel 3:25-26

25. But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them: **25.** Et nunc, Fili hominis, ecce posuerunt super te vincula,⁸² et ligabunt te illis,⁸³ ideo non egredieris in medium ipsorum:

26. And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they *are* a rebellious house. **26.** Et linguam tuam adhaerere faciam palato tuo, et obmutesces, et non eris illis in virum coarguentem⁸⁴ quia domus rebellionis⁸⁵ sunt.

Now God explains the reason why he wishes the Prophet to cease for a time, and to remain at home as if dumb. *They have placed*, said he, *ropes upon thee with which they may bind thee*. The opinion of those who take the passage metaphorically is not unsuitable, as if it had been said, the perverseness of the people hinders Ezekiel in the discharge of his duty, just as if he had been bound with ropes.

To make this clearer, we may call to mind what Paul says to the Corinthians, (2 Corinthians 6:11,) namely, that he was held in bondage, because his teaching could not find access to them, nor penetrate to their souls. “Our mouth,” says he, “is open towards you, O Corinthians! Our heart is enlarged towards you:” that is, as far as lieth in me, I am prepared faithfully to spend my labors

⁸² , *gnebuthim*, “ropes,” “twisted and perplexed ropes.” — Calvin.

⁸³ That is, “with which they bind thee.” — Calvin.

⁸⁴ “One who reproves;” — “Qui les repreuve;” — Fr. “vel Corripientem.” — Calvin.

⁸⁵ Or, “of bitterness.” — Calvin.

upon you: but your bowels are straitened. Since therefore men, by their own depravity, hinder the course of doctrine, by reducing the servants of God to straits, it is quite consistent to represent the malice of those who are not teachable to be like ropes by which faithful teachers are bound, so that they cannot proceed freely in the course of their duty. If any one, however, prefers taking what is here said strictly and literally, the sentence must thus be understood, that the Israelites were not as yet prepared for instruction, because if the Prophet shall utter God's commands immediately, they would be like the furious who would lay hands upon him and bind him with ropes. This sense also is very appropriate, and hence we may choose freely between them. But as to the general purport, God's intention is by no means obscure, namely, that the Prophet ought not to take it ill, if he be for a time apparently useless without obtaining either hearers or fit disciples. We see then that this is said for the Prophet's comfort, that he should not murmur or take it ill that God wishes him 'to remain shut up at home; because the fit time had not yet come, as if it had been said — "If you hasten now, you will approach furious men who will by and bye rush against you and bind you with ropes. Because, therefore, you see them not yet prepared for learning, wait a while until I prepare their ears for you, that they may attend to you; or at least, that they may be rendered the more excuseless, I will send thee; and meanwhile, although they are as yet perverse, yet they cannot rise violently against thee, but whether they will or not, they shall be compelled to hear the commands which proceed from my mouth." And he afterwards confirms this at length, as we shall see.

But he now adds, *I will fix thy tongue to thy palate* — or I will make thy tongue adhere to thy palate — *so that thou shalt not be to them a reprover, because they are a rebellious house* What God ascribed to the Israelites he now transfers to himself. He had said, *They will bind thee with ropes*: he now says, *I will make thy tongue cleave to thy palate* But these two things are easily reconciled, because in truth the Israelites rejected prophecies through their intemperance, and God thus deprived them of this benefit, because he saw they were unworthy of it. But this place shows that it is a sign of God's vengeance, when all prophecies cease, and opportunity for hearing is taken away. For as God shines upon us by his instruction, and we have thereby a certain pledge of his fatherly grace and favor, so also when instruction is removed, it is just as if God hid his face, nay, even turned his back upon us. We must consider, therefore, what is here said — *because the house of Israel was rebellious*: hence the Prophet was dumb, and refrained from teaching those impious ones. God therefore desists, when he sees that he is dealing with the stupid and deaf; but, not on the first occasion of their wearying him, because he rather contends with man's ingratitude, and never ceases, as we see in Jeremiah, to rise in the morning, and to keep watch even while it is yet night; (Jeremiah 7:2; Jeremiah 11:7; Jeremiah 35:14; Psalm 74:9;) he never ceases to call to himself even those who are slow and sluggish, nay, even the utterly rebellious: but at length, when he sees that he does not succeed by long-suffering, he takes away his instruction, as we have said. And therefore the Church complains that it is destitute of Prophets, and places that slaughter among the extreme signs of God's anger: "We do not see our signs, and Prophets do not appear among us." In this way they understand that they are alienated from God, and that no consolation remains to them, when God does not give them any taste of his goodness by Prophets. The ungodly indeed wish this, because nothing is more troublesome to them than to hear God continually exclaiming. Hence, as far as they can, they seek hiding-places, and think nothing better for themselves than to be torpid amidst their vices, and to be deaf to every voice of reproach; but yet nothing is more destructive to them, because God offers himself as a physician who cures our diseases, while he exhorts us to wisdom. But when he is silent, he deserts us as if abandoned to destruction, and

hence I said that nothing is more destructive than when no reproach sounds in our ears, but we are sweetly flattered, because in this way Satan deprives us of our senses, and this is his final poisoning, when he so soothes us with his blandishments, that all reproach which may alarm our security altogether ceases. Now it follows: —

Ezekiel 3:27

27. But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbear, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house. **27.** Et quum locutus fuero, et aperuero os tuum: ⁸⁶ tunc dices ad eos, sic dicit Dominator: qui audit audiat: et qui desistit desistat: quia domus rebellionis sunt.

After a silence, God shows by what commands he wishes to instruct his servant, namely, by such as would exasperate the people, as we have formerly seen. His embassy therefore was hateful, since the Prophet begins with this insult — “If ye wish to hear, hear; but if not, I am not concerned.” Those who are sent as ambassadors are usually ordered to try whether they can conciliate, by courteous and friendly discourse, those with whom they have to deal. But God here follows a method completely the contrary. For what is the meaning of these words, *He who hears, let him hear: he who desists, let him, desist?* namely, that the Israelites may understand that the Prophet was sent to them, not because there was any hope of their becoming wise again, since they had borne witness by experiments sufficiently numerous that they were altogether desperate: but the Lord sends the Prophet, that he may strike and wound them further, and at length inflict a deadly blow. Now, therefore, we see that confirmed which the Prophet previously brought forward, that the office of teaching was enjoined upon him, not because his labor would be useful and fruitful with reference to the common people, but that he might inflame the Israelites to madness, if they were unwilling to grow wise again, that he might break them if they would not bend, and if they rejected him, that he should accuse them before God, who would be their judge, and in the meanwhile the course of Prophetic teaching would be free, however pertinaciously they might resist it. Now we understand the intention of the Prophet. Hence also we collect what I have lately touched upon: that God deals with the reprobate in various ways. Sometimes he makes it doubtful whether they be curable, and destines Prophets for them, who should exhort them to repentance. But when he sees them in their ingratitude burying all the light, then he deprives them of all doctrine; afterwards it shines forth again: at length other and denser darkness succeeds: therefore let us hasten, as long as the doctrine of salvation shines upon us, lest God darken all our minds and senses, and deprive us of that singular benefit, when the image of his paternal favor is engraven on us, as we have said. Let us go on —

⁸⁶ Thus I interpret it: verbally “I will open thy *mouth*,” but I read in one context — “when I shall have spoken to thee, and shall have opened thy mouth.” — *Calvin*.

CHAPTER 4

Ezekiel 4:1-3

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| <p>1. Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:</p> <p>2. And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set <i>battering</i> rams against it round about.</p> <p>3. Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it <i>for</i> a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This <i>shall be</i> a sign to the house of Israel.</p> | <p>1. Et tu, Fili hominis, sume tibi laterem, et pone ipsum coram facie tua, et pinge super ipsum urbem, nempe Hierosolymam:</p> <p>2. Et pone contra eam obsidionem, et extrue contra eam turrim, et funde adversus eam aggerem, et pone adversus eam castra, et statue contra eam arietes in circuitu.</p> <p>3. Et tu sume tibi patenam vel sartagine ferream, et pone illam murum ferreum inter te et urbem: et obfirma faciem tuam adversus eam vel contra ex opposito, et sit in obsidionem, et obsidebis eam. Hoe signum domui Israel.</p> |
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Here God begins to speak more openly by means of his servant, and not to speak only, but to signify by an outward symbol what he wishes to be uttered by his mouth. Hence he orders the Prophet *to paint Jerusalem on a brick* Take therefore, he says, *a brick, and place it in thy sight: then paint on it a city, even Jerusalem* This is one command: then *erect a tower against it*. He describes the form of ancient warfare; for then when they wished to besiege cities, they erected mounds from which they filled up trenches: then they moved about wooden towers, so that they might collect the soldiers into close bands, and they had other machines which are not now in use. For fire-arms took away that ancient art of warfare. But God here Simply wishes the picture of a city to be besieged by Ezekiel. Then he orders him to *set up a pan or iron plate, like a wall of iron* This had been a childish spectacle, unless God had commanded the Prophet to act so. And hence we infer, that sacraments cannot be distinguished from empty shows, unless by the word of God. The authority of God therefore is the mark of distinction, by which sacraments excel, and have their weight and dignity, and whatever men mingle with them is frivolous. For this reason we say that all the pomps of which the Papal religion is full are mere trifles. Why so? because men have thought out whatever dazzles the eyes of the simple, without any command of God.

But if any one now objects, that the water in baptism cannot penetrate as far as the soul, so as to purge it of inward and hidden filth, we have this ready answer: baptism ought not to be considered in its external aspect only, but its author must be considered. Thus the whole worship under the law had nothing very different from the ceremonies of the Gentiles. Thus the profane Gentiles also slew their victims, and had whatever outward splendor could be desired: but that was entirely futile, because God had not commanded it. On the other hand, nothing was useless among the Jews. When they brought their victims, when the blood was sprinkled, when they performed ablutions, God's command was added, and afterwards a promise: and so these ceremonies were not without their use. We must therefore hold, that sacraments at first sight appear trifling and of no moment, but their efficacy consists in the command and promise of God. For if any one reads what Ezekiel here relates, he would say that it, was child's play. He took a brick, he painted a city on it: it was only

a figment: then he had imaginary machines by which he besieged the city: why boys do better than this: next he set up a plate of iron like a wall: this action is not a whit more serious than the former. Thus profane men would not only despise, but even carp at this symbol. But when God sends his Prophet, his authority should be sufficient for us, which is a certain test for our decision, and cannot fail, as I have said. First, he says, *paint a city, namely Jerusalem: then lay siege to it, and move towards it all warlike instruments: place even* , *kerim*, which some interpret “leaders,” but they are “lambs,” or “rams,” for the Hebrews metaphorically name those iron machines by which walls are thrown down “rams,” as the Latins do. Some indeed prefer the rendering “leaders,” but I do not approve of their opinion. At length he says, *this shall be a sign* and on this clause we must dwell: for, as I already said, the whole description may be thought useless, unless this testimony be added: indeed the whole vision would be insipid by itself, unless the savor arose from this seasoning, since God says, *this should be a sign to the Israelites*.

When God pronounces that the Prophet should do nothing in vain, this ought to be sufficient to lead us to acquiesce in his word. If we then dispute according to our sense, he will show that what seems foolish overcomes all the wisdom of the world, as Paul says. (1 Corinthians 1:25.) For God sometimes works as if by means of folly: that is, he has methods of action which are extraordinary, and by no means in accordance with human judgment. But that this folly of God may excel all the wisdom of the world, let this sentence occur to our minds, when it is here said, *Let this be for a sign to the house of Israel*. For although the Israelites could shake their heads, and put out their tongues, and treat the Prophet with unbridled *insolence*, yet this alone prevailed sufficiently for confounding them, that God said, *this shall be for a sign*. And we know of what event it was a sign, because the Israelites who had been drawn into captivity thought they had been too easy, and grieved at their obedience: then also envy crept in when they saw the rest of the people remaining in the city. Therefore God meets them and shows them that exile is more tolerable than to endure a siege in the city if they were enclosed in it. Besides, there is little doubt that this prophecy was directed against the Jews who pleased themselves, because they were yet at ease in their rest. For this reason, therefore, God orders the Prophet to *erect towers*, then to *pitch a camp*, and to *prepare whatever belongs to the siege of a city*, because very soon afterwards the Chaldeans would arrive, who had not yet oppressed the city, but are just about to besiege it, as we shall afterwards see at length.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou so graciously invitest us to thee, and ceasest not, even if we are deaf, to continue towards us the same goodness — that at length we may be disciplined to obedience and permit ourselves to be ruled by thy word: grant also that we may obey not only for a single day or a short period, but perseveringly, until at the final close of life’s journey we may be gathered at length to thy celestial repose, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LECTURE TWELFTH

Ezekiel 4:4-8

4. Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: pone iniquitatem domus Israel super illud; pro *according* to the number of the days that thou numero dierum quibus eubabis super illud, shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. portabis iniquitatem ipsorum

5. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, iniquitatis ipsorum ad numerum dierum, trecenti three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear et nonaginta dies, ⁸⁷ et portabis iniquitatem domus the iniquity of the house of Israel. Israel.

6. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. Et cum finieris eos dies, tunc eubabis super latum tuum dextrum secundo: et portabis iniquitatem domus Iehudah quadraginta diebus, diem pro anno, diem pro anno constitui tibi. ⁸⁹

7. Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm *shall be* uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. Et ad obsidionem Ierusalem diriges ⁹⁰ faciem: et brachium tuum nudatum (erit), et prophetabis contra eam.

8. And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege. Et ecce posui super te funes, et non vertes a latere tuo ad latum tuum, usque dum compleveris dies obsidionum tuarum.

We must first consider the scope of this prophecy, and we shall then discuss more conveniently its separate parts. It is not doubtful that God wished to oppose the pride of the people, for they thought themselves punished more severely than they deserved. And this is customary with hypocrites, because while they dare not acquit themselves altogether, they yet murmur as if God afflicted them too severely, then they willingly offer something in compensation that they may free themselves from punishment. For although they confess themselves guilty, yet they do not cease to turn aside, and think if God descends to equity with them, that either they will escape, or at least be less miserable. Such was the disposition of the ancient people, as is well known. We now only need to repeat what we have said before: that the Jews were more obstinate because God had spared them. Nor did they think this only temporary, but they exulted with great freedom, as if they had settled all their business with God. Meanwhile the exiles were constantly complaining, first, that God had treated them so severely, and yet had in clemency pardoned the Jews: then they thought that they had been deceived, and that if they had prudently attended to their own affairs they could have escaped the miseries by which they were oppressed. Now, therefore, Ezekiel is ordered to come forward into the midst of them, and shortly to show that no other result is possible but that the whole people should receive the reward of their wickedness. But because simple teaching was not sufficient to stir them up, a vision is added, and to this end the Prophet is ordered *to lie on one*

⁸⁷ Or, "I have appointed *thee*." — Calvin.

⁸⁸ "They shall be" is *understood*. — Calvin.

⁸⁹ "I shall now go on with the whole *context*." — Calvin

⁹⁰ Or, "station," for *ken*, signifies *either*. — Calvin.

side for three hundred and ninety days, and on the other side forty days. Now the interpretation is added, *that days are taken for so many years* But the meaning is, that the people through three hundred and ninety years carried on war with God, because they had never ceased from sin. Hence the Prophet is ordered *to take upon him the iniquity of so many years*: but God appointed him days for years, then forty years are added which belong to the people of Judah.

This place is variously twisted by interpreters. I will not refer to all their comments, for they have fatigued themselves in vain by inventing arguments which vanish of their own accord: I will not spend the time in refuting them, but will only endeavor to elicit the genuine sense. Some extend the name of Israel to the whole body of the people, but this must be rejected; for they begin the three hundred and ninety years from the first revolt, of which mention is made in the Book of Judges, (Judges 2:2,) and they gather together those years during which the Israelites often fell into impiety: hence they reckon the three hundred and ninety years, and subtract those periods in which religion and the pure worship of God flourished, as under Gideon, under Samson for some time, and under David and Solomon. They subtract then those years in which piety flourished among the people, and the remainder reaches about three hundred and ninety years. But it would be absurd to include the tribe of Judah under the name of Israel, when a comparison between each kingdom is made. We know, indeed, that all the posterity of Abraham were so named by their father Jacob, when, therefore, the name of Israel is put, the twelve or thirteen tribes are comprehended without exception; but when there is comparison, Israel signifies only the ten tribes, or that adulterous kingdom which set up Jeroboam as king after the death of Solomon. (1 Kings 12:20.) Since, then, both Israel and Judah are treated of here, it is by no means suitable that the prophecy should speak of the whole people, and mix the tribe of Judah with the rest. Then the event itself dispels many clouds and takes away all room for controversy: for if we number the years from the revolt in Rehoboam's time, we shall find three hundred and ninety years till the siege of Jerusalem. What then can be easier, and what room is there for conjectures? I wonder that Jerome, since he relates nothing but mere trifles, yet boasts of some wonderful wisdom; for he says, he did not do it for the *sake* of boasting, and truly he has little cause for it; for if any one will read his Commentary, he will find nothing but what is puerile. (1 Kings 12:28.) But, as I have already said, since the name of Israel everywhere signifies the ten tribes, this interpretation is best here: namely, that the obstinacy of the ten tribes was continued through three hundred and ninety years. For, as is sufficiently known, Jeroboam erected two altars, that he might turn away the people from the worship of God: for he thought himself not sufficiently established in his kingdom, so as to retain the obedience of the people, unless he turned them away from the house of David. Therefore he used that artifice — thus the worship of God was corrupted among the Israelites. Now by idolatry the Prophet here points out the other sins of the people; for from this fountain flowed all other iniquities. After they had once cut themselves off from God, they became forgetful of the whole law. The Prophet therefore includes all their corruptions under this one expression, since by the edict of their king this people had shaken off the yoke of God, for which Hosea reproaches them. (Hosea 5:11.) We now understand the three hundred and ninety years of Israel's iniquity, because the people then rejected the law, and followed foreign superstitions, which Jeroboam fabricated with no other intention than That; of strengthening the power of his kingdom, just as earthly kings are influenced by no other desire, although they pretend, and even magnificently boast, that they seek God's glory with the utmost devotion, yet their religion is only a delusion; provided only that they retain the people in obedience and duty, any kind of worship, and any mode of worshipping God, is the same

to them. Such, therefore, was the cunning of Jeroboam: but his posterity greatly deteriorated, so that the worship of God could never be restored among the Israelites. Circumcision, indeed, remained, in which they imitated what Moses had commanded in the law, but at the same time they had two altars, and those profane ones, instead of one only. At length they did not hesitate openly to adopt the idolatries of the Gentiles: hence they so mixed up God with their inventions, that what even they valued under the pretense of piety, was an abomination to him. This is the reason why God says *that the iniquity of the people of Israel has endured for three hundred and ninety years*

The difficulty in the second clause is greater, because the computation does not agree exactly. After the death of Josiah we shall only find twenty-two years to the destruction of the city. But we know that this king, of his eminent piety, took care that God should be sincerely worshipped; for he purged the whole land of all its defilements. Where, then, will be those forty years? Hence it is necessary to take a part of the reign of Manasseh, because then Jerusalem not only revolted from the teaching of the law, but that tyrant cruelly raged against all the Prophets, and the city was defiled by innocent blood. Hence it will be necessary to omit the reign of Josiah, then a part of the reign of Manasseh must be cut off, because he did not immediately relapse into idolatry; but after he grew up, then the worship of God and the examples of his fathers being despised, he turned aside to strange and fictitious worship, though he did not persist in his impiety to the end of his life. Eighteen years, then, must be taken and joined to the two-and-twenty, that the number which the Prophet uses may be made up, unless, perhaps, any one would rather take a part of the reign of Josiah. (2 Kings 22) For although that pious king did his utmost to uphold the worship of God, yet we know that the people of very wickedness strove with the goodness of God. For when the law was found no amendment followed, for the memory of all its doctrine had grown obsolete; but when it was placed before the people they ought to have become new. But so far from those who had been previously alienated from God becoming wise again, they betrayed their obstinacy more and more. Since then, the impiety of the people had been detected, it is not surprising that the people of Judah is said to have sinned for forty years. Certainly this latter explanation pleases me most, because the Prophet refers to continuous years, which followed the captivity of the ten tribes; although I do not reject the other interpretation, because it reckons those years during which Manasseh exercised his tyranny against God's servants, and endeavored as much as he could to abolish his pure worship, and to pollute it with the filth of all the nations. Now, therefore, we understand the forty years of the iniquity of the tribe of Judah.

As to those interpreters who refer the four hundred and thirty years to the siege of the city, as if God's vengeance was thus satisfied, I fear it will not hold good; it seems to me not a suitable explanation; it only signifies that it is not surprising if their enemies besiege the city so long, since they did not cease to provoke God for as many years as the siege continued days. The city was besieged a whole year and two or three months. The beginning of the siege continues to the end of the half year, but it was finished in three or four months, when Pharaoh endeavored to free the *Jews*, who were then his allies and confederates, by bringing up his army. Then Nebuchadnezzar went forth to meet him, and the city was relieved for a short time. Now if we take three hundred and ninety days, we shall find a whole year at first, that is three hundred and sixty-five years, although then there was an intercalary month, and they had not their year defined as we now have; but yet there will be three hundred and sixty-five days, which make a complete year. The two months will make sixty days, so we shall have four hundred and twenty days. Now a month and a half elapsed before the return of Nebuchadnezzar. Then the computation will amount to four hundred

and thirty years. But interpreters are satisfied, because the siege of the city endured to a time which answers to that prescribed to Abraham. For God entered into covenant with Abraham four hundred and thirty years before the promulgation of the law. But I do not see why they are so satisfied with this resemblance. Nor is this the meaning of our Prophet. When he speaks of a siege he certainly regards especially the destruction of the city. Therefore I do not think that the days of the siege are here enumerated as a just punishment, but only that years are compared with days, that they may determine how long the siege should be, and that the end was not to be, expected until the whole people perished.

Besides, we see as we go on that the Prophet lay on his side three hundred and ninety days; where there is no mention of forty days, and that part seems to be omitted. Yet this remains fixed, because Israel and Judah had been obstinate in their wickedness; hence the city was besieged until it was utterly taken. Now surely the punishment of Israel cannot be considered as consisting in the overthrow of the holy city; for already the ten tribes had migrated from their country, and did not know what was doing at Jerusalem, except by report. Whatever happened their condition was altogether separate from all the miseries of the people, for they were then quiet in exile. As then the Prophet is ordered *to bear the iniquity of Israel for three hundred and ninety days*, this ought not to be restricted to the siege. God simply means, since so many years had elapsed during which both Israelites and Jews had not ceased to sin, their final destruction was already at hand. But we know that then the kingdom of Judah was extinguished, and exile was to the ten tribes like death. On this account they had perished; nor did the Prophet bear their iniquity as if they were then paying the penalty of their sins. But we know that this is the customary manner of Scripture, because God reckons sins to the third and fourth generation. (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9.) When, therefore, God wished the ten tribes to be dragged into exile, then he punished them for their wickedness three hundred and ninety years. Afterwards he bore with the city of Jerusalem for a certain time, and endured a similar impiety in that tribe, that he should not utterly blot out the memory of the people. But the Jews did not repent, since we also see by Isaiah comparing them with the Israelites, that they became worse. (Isaiah 18:1, 7, 8 [*sic*].) Micah reproves them for following the statutes of Omri; (Micah 6:16,) whence it is not surprising if the punishment which they endure should answer to the wickedness in which they had involved themselves. We shall see also that the same subject is repeated by our Prophet in Ezekiel 16.

On the whole then, God wished to show the people that they had abused his forbearance too much and too long, since they did not desist from sinning even to the four hundred and thirtieth year. The Israelites indeed began to turn aside from the true worship of God while the Temple still remained pure, but at length the tribe of Judah, by degenerating, became guilty of the same impiety. Now we understand the intention of the Holy Spirit.

I pass on to the words. *Thou, says he, shalt lie upon thy left side* We must remark that this was not in reality completed, because Ezekiel did not lie for three hundred and ninety days upon his side, but only by a vision, that he might afterwards relate to the people what God had made manifest. As to the opinion of those commentators who think the ten tribes are meant by the left side, because Samaria was situated to the left hand, I do not think it applicable. I do not doubt that God wished to prefer the tribe of Judah to the kingdom of Israel; for although the ten tribes excelled in the number, opulence, and strength of men, yet God always made more, of the kingdom of Judah. For here was the seat of David; and the ten tribes were the posterity of Abraham only after the flesh, the promise remained to Jerusalem, and there also the lamp of God shone, as we have said in many

places. Hence the right side signifies that dignity with which God wished always to adorn the kingdom of Judah: but the ten tribes are marked by the left side; because, as I have said, they did not enjoy equal glory with the kingdom of Judah, although they are more numerous, more courageous, and more abundant in all good things. It must now be observed that the burden of bearing their iniquity was imposed on the Prophet: not because God transferred to him the iniquity of the people, as some here invent an allegory, and say that the Prophet was a type of Christ, who bore on himself the iniquity of the people. But an expiation is not here described: but we know that God uses his servants for different purposes. So therefore the Prophet on one side is ordered to oppose Jerusalem, as if he were the king of Babylon; hence he sustains the character of king Nebuchadnezzar when he opposes the city of brick, of which we spoke yesterday. Now he sustains other characters, as of the ten tribes and the kingdom of Judah, *when he lies upon his left side three hundred and ninety days, and on his right side forty days* For this reason also it is said, *I have appointed to thee the years of this iniquity, according to then number, of the days, etc;* that is, when I order thee to lie on thy right side so many days, I represent to thee years. For it would have been absurd to demand of the Prophet to lie upon one side four centuries, so God accommodates himself in these figures to our standard; and it is contrary to nature that a man should lie for four centuries, and because that is absurd, God changes years into days; and this is the reason why days are said to be substituted for years. Afterwards it is added, *when thou shalt have fulfilled those years, then thou shalt afterwards lie upon thy right side, and shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days* Here God shows the tribe of Judah, that when it ought to be frightened by the punishment of the kingdom of Israel, it still persisted in its wickedness hence the Jews could not possibly escape the punishment of the Israelites.

It is added, *and towards the siege of Jerusalem thou shalt set or establish thy face* Either meaning may be received; either directing and ordering, or establishing and strengthening; although the word directing or ordering pleases me better in this place. He had said, indeed, before, thou shalt direct thy face until Jerusalem shall be besieged; but in my opinion God simply here orders his Prophet to be intent on the overthrow of the city. *And thine arm shall be made bare;* that is, for expedition: for we know that orientals use flowing tunics and long robes, so that they cannot execute any business without putting off their garments. Hence the Prophet is here ordered *to make bare his arm*, just as if any one should take his coat half off, and throw it over the other side, that he might have one arm free. Such was the dress of the Prophet, but by a vision, as I have said. Afterwards it is added, *that thou, shalt prophesy against it* Again God repeats what we saw yesterday: for nothing had been colder than that the Prophet should make bare his arm, and direct his face against towards the siege of a painted city. Had the picture been only an empty one, the spectacle might be justly condemned; but God adds the meaning to the figures, that the prophecy may have more force: as if he had said, I see that these signs are not of themselves of much moment, and you may object to me, why do you concern yourself with these trifles? But whatever you do shall be a certain seal of prophecy. Now we see why God joins the word “prophecy.” Then he adds, *Behold I will place upon thee ropes, so that thou canst not turn from, side to side, until thou hast completed the days of thy siege* God here signifies that his decree concerning the siege of Jerusalem was inviolable: for as he held his servant so bound down, by this the firmness of his decree was designated, because the Jews thought that they could extricate themselves by their deceits. For we know that they always flattered themselves when the Prophets threatened them. Therefore God signifies that the siege of the city was certain until it was taken; because the Prophet should be

bound with cords, and should not move himself, nor turn from one side to the other. And hence we understand, from the figure here used, that the Jews should suffer the same punishments as the ten tribes. Just as if God should say that the time determined for the destruction of the kingdom of Israel had come, and that the same end would happen to the Jews; for ill whatever direction they might escape, yet the same execution of God's judgment would arrive, as if the matter had been already determined. Now it follows:

Ezekiel 4:9

9. Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, 9. Et tu sume tibi triticum, et hordeum, et and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, fabam, et lentem, et millium, zeam, ⁹¹ et pones and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread ea in vase uno, et facies ea tibi in panem ⁹² pro thereof, *according* to the number of the days that numero dierum, quibus jacebis super latus tuum, thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and trecentis et nonaginta diebus comedes illum. ninety days shalt thou eat thereof.

It is by no means doubtful, that this verse applies to the siege, because God signifies that the city would then suffer famine, but a little afterwards he adds another vision, from which we gather, that the subject is not only the siege of Jerusalem, but the general vengeance of God against all the tribes, which had fallen on the Jews through their alliance with them, and which ended at length in the siege. But here God shows the future condition of the city Jerusalem. For this various kind of bread is a sign of want, for we make bread of wheat, and if any region is barren there barley is eaten or' vetches, and if we have but a moderate supply, still wheaten bread is used, but when lentils and beans, and millet and spelt are used, a severer penury is portrayed. In the time of Jerome the name of spelt was in use for "zea," since he says, it was "gentile" among the Italians. I know not how it agrees with what Jerome calls "vetches;" in his Commentaries he says it is "zea," and uses that name for spelt, which was then wheat: whatever it is, when leguminous plants are mixed with wheat, and when barley and spelt are used, it shows a deficiency in ordinary food. It is just as if the Prophet Ezekiel were to denounce against the Jews a deficiency in the harvest which they were then reaping while they were free, for this vision was offered to the Prophet before the city was besieged. Hence he threatened want and famine at a time when they were still eating bread made of pure wheat. For he orders *all these things to be put in one vessel* Hence we gather, that this mixture would be by no means acceptable to delicate palates: for we know that beans and lentils are grosser than wheat, and cannot be kneaded into a dough of the right kind, since the wheat and pulse are dissimilar. For this reason, then, God *places them in one vessel* Then it is added — *thou shalt make bread for thee according to the number of the days* The days here numbered are the three hundred and ninety: there is no mention of the forty days, but it may be a part put for the whole. Now it follows:

⁹¹ The word for "fitches" is in the plural: so the word for "barley:" there is an enallage of the number. — Calvin

⁹² That is, thou shalt make bread for thyself out of them. — Calvin

Ezekiel 4:10-11

10. And thy meat which thou shalt eat *shall* be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. **10.** Et cibus quem comedes in pondere, erit viginti siclorum pro die ⁹³ a tempore usque ad tempus comedes. ⁹⁴

11. Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. **11.** Et aquas in mensuram bibes in sextam partem hin: a tempore usque ad tempus bibes.

This confirms what I have said, namely, that the want should be such, that the Prophet dared not eat even that bread to satiety: *you shall eat*, says he, *bread by weight*, viz, *twenty shekels*. These are not complete rounds, so that the sense is, that God commanded his Prophet to live sparingly. When the city was besieged, bread was distributed in pieces to each person. God then here says, that the Jews should be almost famished during the siege, so that they should not have bread except by fixed weight, and that a small one. What follows is more miserable, namely, the want of water; for this is the last stage of calamity when thirst oppresses us. it seems hard, indeed, to want wine, but when water is deficient, this, as I have said, is the last stage of famine, and this the Prophet denounces against the Jews when he says, *water was not given to him during the time of the siege unless by measure*. I shall leave the rest till to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, since thou hast thus far sustained us by thy inestimable clemency, grant that we may not abuse thy goodness, and by our perverseness provoke thy vengeance against us, but may we prevent thy judgment, and so submit ourselves to thee that thou mayest take us into thy confidence and protect us against all our enemies: then supply us bountifully with whatever is needful for us, and since thou wishest us to restrain our natural desires, may we never be deficient in spiritual food, but be continually refreshed with it, until at length we enjoy that fullness which is promised us and laid up for us in heaven by Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE THIRTEEN

WE saw in yesterday's lecture that as many days were assigned to the siege of the city Jerusalem as years in which they had provoked God's wrath. For, as I have said, God did not punish them for their wickedness by a long siege, because in this way Israel had been free from punishment. But the meaning is, that as during four hundred and thirty years they did not cease adding to themselves the vengeance of God, so now the end had come for paying them their wages which they had earned. Now it follows —

⁹³ That is, in or for each *day*.--*Calvin*.

⁹⁴ That is, from the beginning to the end: viz., from the first day to the 390th. — *Calvin*

Ezekiel 4:12-13

12. And thou shalt eat it *as* barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight. **12.** Et placentam ⁹⁵ hordeorum comedes, et ipsam in stercoribus humanam excrementi coques coram oculis ipsorum.

13. And the LORD said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them. **13.** Et dixit Iehovah: sic comedent filii Israel panem suum pollutum in gentibus ad quas expulero eos.

This vision properly belongs to the ten tribes, and, for this reason, I have said that God's vengeance is not to be considered as to the siege of the city alone, but to be extended longer. After the Prophet had spoken of the siege of Jerusalem, he adds, that their reward was prepared for the children of Israel, because a just God was the avenger of each people. As, therefore, he punished the remnant who as yet remained at Jerusalem, so he avenged the wickedness of the ten tribes in exile at Babylon. For this reason the Prophet is ordered to *cook a cake with dung*: that is, he is commanded to take human dung instead of fuel: nor does he simply say dung, but *the dung of men*. By and bye the application follows. *Thus the children of Israel shall eat their polluted bread among the Gentiles* Now, therefore, we see that the Jews are at length drawn to judgment, because they had not been so touched with the slaughter of their brethren as to repent, but, in the meantime, the wrath of God was conspicuous against the ten tribes, because among the Gentiles those miserable exiles were compelled to eat their bread polluted. We know that cakes are made of the finest flour, for the purer the flour the more delicate is the bread, but the Prophet is ordered to *make cakes of barley*, and then to *cook them in dung*, for that uncleanness was forbidden by the law. (Leviticus 5:3; Leviticus 7:21.) Therefore God signifies, that the Israelites were so rejected that they differed in nothing from polluted nations; for the Lord had separated them as we know from the rest of the world: but from the time of their mingling themselves with the filth of the impious, at length, after long forbearance, they were altogether rejected as it is here said. For under this figure a universal pollution is signified, as if he had said, nothing is any longer holy or sacred in Israel, because they are mixed up with the pollutions of all nations: finally, the impure bread embraces within itself all kinds of impiety. Now when he says *among the Gentiles*, it means, that they would be such inhabitants of the lands among which they were driven, that they should be not only exiles but banished from the land of Canaan, which was their inheritance. In fine, a disinheriting is here marked, when the Jews are said to be driven about hither and thither, so as not to, dwell in the promised land. It follows —

Ezekiel 4:14-15

⁹⁵ That is, “made of barley.” — Calvin.

14. Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth anima mea non fuit polluta, et cadaver et up even till now have I not eaten of that which discerptum non comedi a pueritia mea huc usque, dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came et non intravit in os meum caro putrefacta.⁹⁷ there abominable flesh into my mouth.

15. Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith. **15.** Et dixit mihi, Vide, dedi tibi stercorei bovis pro stercore hominis, et facies panem tuum super illa.⁹⁸

The Prophet here inserts the answer which he received to his request that God would relax his severe command: for it was abominable to eat flesh cooked with human dung, not only on account of the stench, but because religion forbade it: though the Prophet did not regard the taste of his palate, but objects that it was not lawful for him, and relates how anxiously he had abstained during his whole life from all polluted food. For if he had formerly dared to feed promiscuously on all sorts of food, he could not pray against it as he now does, that he should not be compelled to eat polluted bread: but he shows here that he had abstained throughout his whole life from all polluted food. *My soul*, says he, *never was polluted*: for soul is often put for the belly: then *never have I tasted of a carcass, or of what has been torn in pieces* By the figure a part put for the whole, he intends all unclean meats, which were unlawful food, according to the commandments of the law. (Leviticus 9.) For because a carcass is mixed with blood, God forbade them to touch the flesh of an animal which died by itself, because it had not been strangled, then if a wild beast should tear a sheep or an ox, that cruelty ought to be detestable to men. Since, therefore, both a carcass and torn and lacerated flesh are unclean food, the Prophet here says, that from his childhood even to that time he had kept the commands of God with his utmost endeavors: hence he obtains, as I have said, some mitigation. Yet he is compelled to eat his flesh cooked with the dung of oxen. This was done by vision, as I said yesterday: but meanwhile God did not change what he had determined concerning the people: viz. *that they should eat their bread polluted among the Gentiles*. For a cake cooked in the dung of oxen was unclean according to the Law. Hence God shows his own *decree* was fixed that the Israelites should be mingled among the Gentiles, so that they should contract pollution from their filth. It follows —

Ezekiel 4:16-17

⁹⁶ “Or, *alas*.” — Calvin

⁹⁷ Or abominable, *pigol*, is their word for corrupt or rancid, or putrefied, and hence by translation animal flesh is called detestable, that is, of an unclean animal.” — Calvin.

⁹⁸ That is, “thou shalt cook.”

16. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, **16.** Et dixit mihi, Fili heminis, ecce ego behold, I will break the staff of bread in frango ⁹⁹ baculum panis in Hierusalem: ¹⁰⁰ et Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, comedent panem in pondere et metu, ¹⁰¹ et aquas and with care; and they shall drink water by in mensura, et in stupore bibent. measure, and with astonishment:

17. That they may want bread and water, and **17.** Ut indigeant pane et aquis ¹⁰² et be astonied one with another, and consume away obstupeant, ¹⁰³ vir et frater ejus, et liquefiant ¹⁰⁴ for their iniquity. in iniquitate sua.

God returns again to the citizens of Jerusalem, and announces that they should be so destroyed by famine, that they should be reduced to the last extremity, and all but consumed by want. But he places here two forms of punishment: he says, *that he should break the staff of bread*: then, that their *abundance of bread should be small*, because they would be compelled to eat their morsels *by weight and fear, and to drink water by measure and astonishment*. I said they were different forms, because even if bread was sufficient, God often breaks its staff, as he calls it. And this clearly appears from Leviticus 26:26, whence our Prophet has adopted this expression. For here Moses explains what it is to break the staff of bread; because, he says, ten women shall cook their bread in one dish, and then they must *bona fide* restore the quantity of meal given them; for the bread shall be weighed, and thou shalt eat and not be satisfied. There God had said, I will break the staff of bread: but a clearer explanation follows — namely, although wheat for cooking the bread should be sufficient, and the women should mutually observe each other that no theft should take place, but should return in weight what had been given out to them, yet its nourishment should be deficient. We see then that God breaks the staff of bread, when a sufficiently plentiful supply exists, but those who eat are not satisfied.

That this may appear more clearly, we muse assume the principle that men do not live by bread only, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God, (Deuteronomy 8:3,) for here God signifies that we are not nourished by virtue of the bread, properly speaking: for how can bread be life-giving when it wants both sense and vigor? We see then that there is no force in bread to nourish us which excludes the hidden grace of God, for we live by the word of God. The subject here is not the word of doctrine nor yet spiritual life; but Moses understands that we are sustained not by bread and wine and other food, or by any kind of drink, but by the secret virtue Of God whilst he inspires the bread with rigor for our nourishment. Bread then is our nourishment, but not by any peculiar or intrinsic virtue: this it has from another source, namely, the favor and ordination of God. As, therefore, a small portion of bread is sufficient; for us, so if any one gorge himself he will cry out sooner than be satisfied, unless God inspires the virtue. And for this reason Christ uses that passage against Satan: Man lives not by bread alone, (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4,) because he shows that the life of man was propped up by the secret virtue of God, and that God, whenever it

⁹⁹ Or, “destroy.” — Calvin.

¹⁰⁰ Or, “at Jerusalem.” — Calvin.

¹⁰¹ Or, “with fear and trembling.” — Calvin

¹⁰² That is, “bread and water shall fail *them*.” — Calvin.

¹⁰³ “Others, they shall be desolate, , *shemem*, signifies both.” — Calvin.

¹⁰⁴ Or, “consume away.” — Calvin.

pleases him, does not need these foreign assistances. God then can sustain us by himself: sometimes he uses bread, but only as an adventitious instrument; in the meantime he derogates nothing from his own virtue: hence a staff is taken metaphorically for a prop. For as old men already totter on their legs, and all their limbs being broken down by weakness, support themselves with a staff, so also bread is said to have a staff, because we are propped up by the nourishment. Our strength also becomes deficient, and hence he who takes nourishment is said to refresh himself with food. God, therefore, breaks the staff of bread when he renders men famished, even when they have a sufficient abundance of bread. Neither are *they* satisfied, how much soever they may gorge themselves, because the food loads instead of refreshes them.

This is the first punishment with which God threatens the Jews. Another also is added, namely, *that they shall be destitute of bread*. We see then that there is a double mode by which God punishes us by hunger. For although bread is sufficient, yet he breaks and destroys its staff, so that it cannot prop us up nor recall our lost vigor. At length he takes away our bread, because he either strikes our fruits with blight or hail, or makes us suffer under other calamities. Hence barrenness brings want, so that God will affect us with hunger both ways: for he says, *behold! I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem*, and then he adds, *they shall eat their bread by weight and in fear, they shall drink their water by measure and in astonishment*, because in truth they shall be reduced to such straits that they shall *scarcely* dare to touch their bread, because while they look forward to the morrow they shall fear and be astonished. And he confirms this opinion in the next verse, *that they shall be destitute of bread and water, and shall be astonished*: for this explanation agrees better; therefore *a man and his brother shall be astonished*, that is, they shall look mutually on each other as if astonished. Thus those who are without wisdom and discern nothing but despair are accustomed to act: at length *they shall pine away in their iniquity*. Again God repeats that the Jews could not complain when he so grievously afflicts them, because they shall receive the reward of their own iniquity. Now follows —

CHAPTER 5

Ezekiel 5:1-4

1. And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause *it* to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the *hair* illa.¹⁰⁷

1. Et tu, fili hominis, sume tibi gladium acutum, novaculum tonsorum, sume eum tibi, et transire fac,¹⁰⁵ super caput tuum, et super barbam tuam: et sume tibi stateram ponderis,¹⁰⁶ et divide illa.¹⁰⁷

2. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them.

2. Tertiam partem igne combures in medio urbis, ut completi fuerint dies¹⁰⁸ obsidionis: et tu tertiam partem, percuties gladio per circuitum ejus, tertiam vero partem sparges in vento: et gladium evaginabo post eos.

3. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts.

3. Et sumes inde exiguum in numero, et ligabis illa¹⁰⁹ in alis tuis.¹¹⁰

4. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; *for* thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel.

4. Et ex illis adhuc sumes, et projicies illa in medium ignis mittes et combures illa igne, unde egredietur ignis in totum domum Israel.

By another vision God confirms what he had lately taught concerning the siege of Jerusalem. For he orders the Prophet to shave the hairs off his head and his beard, then to distribute them into three parts, and to weigh them in a balance. He mentions a just balance, that equity may be preserved, and that one portion may not surpass another. There is no doubt that by the hairs he understands the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as by the head he understands the seat itself of their dwelling-place. Then the application will follow; but this I shall pass by today, because I cannot proceed farther. It is sufficient to hold briefly, that men are here designated by hairs, for hair can scarcely be counted, indeed that of the beard is countless; such was the multitude at Jerusalem, for we know that the city was very populous. We know, again, that it took occasion for pride from this; when they saw that they were strong in the multitude of their people, they thought themselves equal, if not superior, to all enemies, and hence their foolish confidence, which destroyed them. God then commanded the Prophet to shave off all the hairs of his head and of his beard. Thus he taught that not even one man should escape the slaughter, because he says, *make the sword pass*, or pass it, *over thy head, then over thy chin*, so that nothing may remain. We see, then, how far the passing of the razor is to

¹⁰⁵ That is, “draw it across” — Calvin.

¹⁰⁶ That is, “a just one.” — Calvin.

¹⁰⁷ That is, “the hairs which are erect upon thy head and thy beard.” — Calvin.

¹⁰⁸ “They shall be filled up;” literally, “for filling up the days” — Calvin.

¹⁰⁹ That is, “a small part in number.” — Calvin.

¹¹⁰ That is, “that part of them in the skirts of thy garments.” — Calvin.

go — until no hair remains entire on either the head or beard. Whence it follows, that God will take vengeance on the whole nation, so that not one of them shall survive. As to his ordering *three parts to be weighed*, and a proportion to be kept between them, in this way he signifies what we have often seen in Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 15:2) — Whosoever shall have escaped the sword shall perish by famine, and whosoever shall escape the famine shall perish by some other means. But here God explains at length the manner in which he was about to destroy all the Jews, although they were distributed into various ranks. For their condition might seem different when some had been put to flight, and others had betaken themselves to Egypt. But in this variety God shows that it detracts nothing from his power or intention of destroying them to a man.

Let us come to the words *make a razor pass over thy head and over, thy beard*; and then *take scales* , *maznim*, is properly called a balance on account of its two ears. *Take*, therefore, *a balance*, or *scales for weighing*, and divide *the hair*. What this division means I have already explained, because all the Jews were not consumed by the same punishment,, and therefore those who had escaped one kind of destruction boasted that they were safe. Hence they were enraged against God. But this foolish confidence is taken away, when the Prophet is ordered to divide the hair extracted from his head and beard, *Divide them*, he says; afterwards he adds, *a third part*. As to God's distributing the people into three parts, it is not done without the best reason for it; for a part was consumed by famine and distress before the city was taken. But because God marks all miseries *by fire*, therefore he orders a third part to be cast into the fire, and consumed there. Now because there were two parts remaining, every one promised himself life; for he who escapes present death thinks himself free from all danger, and hence confidence is increased; for we too often think ourselves safe when we have overcome one kind of death. For this reason, therefore, it is added, *after thou hast burnt a third part in the fire*, he says, *take a third part and strike it with the sword*. Besides, he orders a third part to be burnt in the midst of the city. Ezekiel was then in Chaldea, and not near the city; but we said that all this took place by a prophetic vision. What is here said answers to the wrath of God, because before the siege of the city, a third part was consumed by pestilence, and famine, and distress, and other evils and slaughters; and all these miseries are here denoted *by fire*. For after the city had been taken, God orders a third part to be struck with the sword. We know this to have been fulfilled when the king with all his company was seized, as he was flying over the plain of Jericho, (2 Kings 25) when meeting with the hostile army; because very many were killed there, the king himself was carried off, his sons murdered in his sight, while his eyes were put out, and he was dragged to Babylon bound in chains. Hence this is the third part, which *he commanded the Prophet to strike with the sword*, because that slaughter represented the slaughter of the city.

Now it is added, *that he should take a third part and cast it to the wind*: then follows the threat, *I will unsheathe my sword after them*. Here it is spoken as well of the fugitives who had gone into various countries, as of the poor, who being dispersed after the slaughter of the city, protracted their life but a short time. For we know that some lay hid in the land of Moab, others in that of Ammon, more in Egypt, and that others fled to various hiding-places. This dispersion was as if any one should cast the shorn-off hairs to the wind. But God pronounces that their flight and dispersion would not profit them, because he will draw his sword against them and follow them up to the very last. We see therefore, although at first sight the citizens of Jerusalem differ, as if they were divided into three classes, yet the wrath of God hangs over all, and destroys the whole multitude.

It is now added: *Thou shalt take then a small number, and bind them*, (that is, that number, but the number is changed,) viz., *those hairs of which the number is small in the skirts of thy clothing*. It either takes away the confidence which might spring up from a temporary escape, or else it signifies that very few should be safe in the midst of the destruction of the whole people, which came to pass wonderfully. If that is received, the correction is added, that God would give some hope of favor because the people was consumed, yet so that the covenant of God might remain. Hence it was necessary that some relics should be preserved, and they had been reduced like Sodom, unless God had kept for himself a small seed. (Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:29.) Therefore in this sense the Prophet is ordered to bind and to hide in the skirts of his garment, some part of the hair. Moreover, that part is understood only in the third order, because those who had escaped thought that they had obtained safety by flight, especially when they collected themselves in troops. Afterwards it follows, *thou shalt then take from these, and throw it into the midst of the fire, and burn it in the fire*. Out of these few hairs God wishes another part to be burnt and consumed; by which words he signifies, even where only a small portion remains, yet it must be consumed in like manner, or at least that many out of these few will be rejected. And indeed those who seemed to have happily escaped and to have survived safely, were soon after cut off by various slaughters, or pined away by degrees as if they had perished by a slow contagion. But since it pleased him to remember his promise, we gather that a few of the people survived through God's wonderful mercy: for because he was mindful of his covenant, he wished some part to be preserved, and therefore that correction was interposed, that the Prophet should bind under his skirts a small number. Yet from that remnant, God again snatched away another part, and cast it into the fire. If the filth of the remainder was such, that it was necessary to purge it, and cast part of it into the fire, what must be thought of the whole people, that is, of the dregs themselves? For the portion which the Prophet bound in his skirts was clearly the flower of the people: if there was any integrity, it ought to be seen there.

We just saw that there were many reprobate in that small number. Hence, therefore, it is easily gathered how desperate was the impiety of the whole people. *After this*, he says, *take*: this adverb is used that those who survived after the slaughter of the city should not think that all their punishments were over: *after this*, says he, that is, when they shall fancy all their difficulties over, *thou shalt take from that part which thou hast preserved, and shalt cast it into the fire*. *Thence*, he says, *a fire shall go forth through the whole house of Israel*. He signifies by these words, as we have seen before, that the vision was not illusory, just as many fictitious things are represented in a theater. Hence God says, what he shows by vision to his servant would happen, as the event itself at length proved. But he goes further *that the whole house of Israel shall burn in this burning*, because indeed the last destruction of the city brought despair to the miserable, exiles, who, while the city was standing, promised themselves a return. But when they saw such utter destruction of the city, they were consumed just as if fire from Judea had crept even to themselves. In the meantime the remnant are always excepted whom the Lord wonderfully preserved, although he was in a vision destroying the whole people. We now see the tendency of this vision. I will not proceed further, because I should be compelled to desist, and so the doctrine would be abrupt. It is sufficient therefore to hold, although the people was divided into many parts so that the condition of each was distinct, yet that all should perish, since God so determined. Hence the confidence of those who thought they would be safe at Jerusalem was broken: then the ten tribes, which were captives, ought also

to acknowledge that the last vengeance of God was not *complete*, until the city itself, the seat of government and the priesthood was destroyed.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast proclaimed such a proof of thy fierce anger against thine ancient people, that we may this day learn wisdom from the suffering of others, and may so subject ourselves obediently to thee, that thou mayest receive us into favor, and show thyself so propitious to us, that by thy pardon we may be restored from death to life, until we enjoy that eternal blessedness which is provided for us by thine only-begotten Son our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE FOURTEEN.

Ezekiel 5:5-6

5. Thus saith the Lord GOD; This *is* Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries *that are* round about her. 5. Sic dicit Dominator Iehoyah, Haec est Hierusalem, in medio gentium, posui eam, et in circuitu ejus terras.

6. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that *are* round about her: for they have refused my judgments in statutis meis non ambulaverunt. 6. Et mutavit judicia mea ad impietatem ¹¹¹ prae cunctis gentibus: et statuta mea ¹¹² prae terris quae in circuitu ejus: judicia mea spreverunt et in statutis meis non ambulaverunt.

Now God shows the reason why he determined to act so severely and harshly towards that holy city which he had selected as the royal residence. For the greater the benefits with which he had adorned the city, by so much the baser and grosser was their ingratitude. God recounts, therefore, his benefits towards Jerusalem, and that for the sake of reproving it. For if the Jews had embraced the blessing of God, doubtless he would have enriched them more and more with his gifts: but when he saw that they rejected his favors, he was the more angry with their indignity. For contempt of God's benefits is a kind of profanation and sacrilege. Now, therefore, we understand the intention of the Holy Spirit when he says, that Jerusalem was placed as it were on a lofty platform, that its dignity might be conspicuous on all sides. This is not said in praise of Jerusalem, but rather to its greatest disgrace, because whatever the Lord had conferred upon it ought to be taken into account, since they had so unworthily corrupted themselves and had polluted God's glory as it were on

¹¹¹ Or, "she has transgressed my judgments or been rebellious. , *merch*, properly signifies was rebellious against my *judgments*." — Calvin.

¹¹² Or, "was rebellious against my statutes." — Calvin

purpose. As to its being said, *that Jerusalem was in the midst of the nations*, (Psalm 74:12,) I do not take this so precisely as Jerome and most others. For they fancy that Jerusalem was the center of the earth, and he twists other places also into this sense: where God is said to have worked salvation to the midst of the earth, he explains it the very middle, as they say. But that is in my judgment puerile, because the Prophet simply means that Jerusalem was placed in the most celebrated part of the world: it had on all sides the most noble nations and very rich, as is well known, and was not far distant from the Mediterranean Sea: on one side it was opposite to Asia Minor: then it had Egypt for a neighbor, and Babylon on the north. This is the genuine sense of the Prophet, that Jerusalem was endued with remarkable nobility among other nations, as if God had placed it in the highest rank. There is no city which has not nations and lands round it, but God here names *lands and nations par excellence*, not any whatsoever, but those only which excelled in fruitfulness, in opulence, and all advantages. And the demonstrative pronoun is emphatic when he says, *This is Jerusalem*: for he extols the city with magnificent praises, that its ingratitude may appear the greater — hence *it was placed in the midst of the nations and of countries round about it*: because it was surrounded by many opulent regions, and there the grace of God was chiefly displayed, as if it were the most beautiful part of a theater, which attracted all eyes towards it, and moved all minds to admiration.

He now adds, *My judgments are changed* concerning the word *mereh*, I said that it signifies sometimes to change, but oftener to transgress or to reject, and there the sense suits very well, because the Jews were rebellious against the judgments of God even to impiety. But he enlarges upon their wickedness when he says, *my statutes have been despised* since they so addicted themselves to impiety. For if there had been any pretext of virtue, their fault might have been extenuated, but when they cast themselves into gross impiety, and thus despise God's commandments, this is inexcusable. Let us learn from this passage, that unless we use God's blessings with purity the charge of ingratitude will always lie against us: for whatever God bestows upon us, he sanctifies as well to our salvation as to the glory of his name. We are then sacrilegious when we corrupt those things which were destined for his glory; then are we utterly perverse when we convert to our destruction what God has appointed for our salvation. Now we must consider the ingratitude of Jerusalem as flagrant, *because they rejected the commandments of God*. When therefore God deposits among us the treasure of celestial doctrine, we must diligently take care that we do not turn aside to impiety, because there is no excuse for error when once we have been taught what is right, and that from the mouth of God himself. Then he declares the same sentiment in other words, and says, *beyond all nations and all lands which were round about*; by which sentence he signifies that the Jews; were worse than all the rest, because knowingly and willingly they had shaken off God's yoke. Other nations had not conducted themselves better, for we know that the worship of God was then everywhere vitiated: but the impiety of the elect people was fouler, for they turned light into darkness, while the Gentiles wandered in darkness for they were blind, but the conduct of this people was different whom God had familiarly instructed. Since therefore the teaching of the law was conspicuous among the Jews, the Prophet deservedly says, *that they were impious beyond all nations and countries* Then he explains how they had either changed the judgment of God, or were themselves rebellious, *because they had despised*, says he, *my judgments, and had not walked in my statutes* First, he says, they had not fallen through ignorance but through pride and contempt; for when the will of God is made known to us, there is no place for ignorance. We do not sin lightly therefore, but our minds are necessarily infected with pride

and contempt of God. Now he adds, *that they did not walk in his precepts*, by which words he signifies that the contempt just mentioned appeared openly, because in truth the fruit showed itself in their whole life. It follows —

Ezekiel 5:7-8

7. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, 7. Propterea sic dicit Dominator Iehovah Because ye multiplied more than the nations that propter multiplicare vestrum ¹¹³ prae cunctis *are* round about you, *and* have not walked in my gentibus, quae in circuitu vestro sunt, ut in statutis statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither meis non ambularetis, et iudicia mea non have done according to the judgments of the faceretis, et secundum iudicia gentium, quae in nations that *are* round about you; circuitu vestro sunt non faceretis

8. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, 8. Propterea sic dicit Dominator Iehovah, Behold, I, even I, *am* against thee, and will Ecce ego contra *to*, etiam ego: et faciam in medio execute judgments in the midst of thee in the tui iudicia coram oculis gentium. sight of the nations.

This verse is variously expounded on account of the word , *hemenekem*: for some read it jointly in one context, as if through being multiplied they did not worship God; as if he meant that they were luxurious through their opulence, as horses are restive through too much food and fatness. That passage of Moses has been marked: Israel, when highly fed, kicked; therefore they think that this place is like it, and so they combine it together: because thou hast been multiplied beyond all Gentiles which were around thee, thou hast despised my judgments, for thou hast become blind and drunken by prosperity. (Deuteronomy 32:15.) But I do not approve of this sense, for it is clearly too forced. Others derive it from , *hemeh*, which signifies to be agitated or disturbed, and elicit this sense, because ye are tumultuous beyond all nations — -that is, because your lasciviousness and *licentiousness* surpass that of all people, whilst your eagerness has drawn you on as it were without a bridle. But I fear that explanation is far-fetched, and so I take it simply for to be multiplied, or multiplication; for *machor* may be either a noun or a verb, but in the same sense. At the same time, I do not refer this to the number and multitude of the people, nor even to the abundance of goods, as the majority do; for they say that the number of persons was multiplied, which does not suit the sense; if it be referred to wealth, it is indeed true that God had acted liberally towards that city, but I take it actively, that *they have multiplied beyond all nations*: and Jerome, in my opinion, has not rendered it badly by translating, “*because ye have surpassed the nations*,” yet he has departed from the proper sense of the word: so it will be better to retain the verb “multiply” or the noun “multiplication,” yet actively, because they had wantoned intemperately in their superstitions, so that they surpassed all nations in evil doing. *On account then of your multiplying*, or on account of your multiplication beyond all nations, that is, because ye were not content with moderate impiety, but heaped together all kinds of wickedness, so that your impiety has arrived at the highest pitch whence a curse follows it: but before he comes to that he confirms what he had said before, namely,

¹¹³ Or, “because of your multiplication.” — Calvin.

because they had not walked in his statutes, and had not kept his judgments This, therefore, is the meaning of *to multiply*, because when the law was delivered to them they despised it, and imitated the wickedness of the nations and the countries around them. These sentences then agree, because beyond all the nations they had been rebellious in impiety against God, and then because they had multiplied beyond all nations and countries. Again the reason is to be observed, *because they did not walk in God's statutes* For the Gentiles held no course, hence it is not surprising that they wandered in their own oblique direction. But a way had been shown to the Jews: the language of Moses was not in vain. (Deuteronomy 30:19.) I call heaven and earth to witness that I have set before you life and death: choose ye therefore life. Since then God had thus laid down the doctrine of salvation for the Jews, he was the more indignant at their insolence and baseness in not walking according to his statutes. Life then had been set before them, as Moses says; it remained for them to walk therein, which the Gentiles could not do.

Now he adds, *and according to the judgments of the Gentiles which are round about you* Here the Prophet seems to blame what otherwise and in many places is praised. For the Jews ought to be separate from the Gentiles, so that they might worship God in purity, and the Prophets often expostulate with them because they followed the judgments or statutes of the Gentiles. On these words I have said nothing, because they occur often, and it has been already shown in many places why God calls his judgments laws. Some distinguish between judgments and statutes, because judgments belong to mortals, and statutes to ceremonies. But this distinction is not everywhere observed. But God, in very many places, commends the precepts of his law, since he shows that nothing necessary to a complete system of teaching was omitted. But. this name is sometimes transferred to perverse rites and vicious superstitions, so that to walk in the judgments of the Gentiles, is to corrupt oneself with their perverse morals. As I have said already, the Jews were often condemned by the Prophets because they gave themselves up to the corruptions of the Gentiles.

Here, therefore, the Prophet says, *that they had not done according to the judgments of the Gentiles* But he understands that in this particular, also, they had surpassed the madness of the Gentiles, because they had not embraced the law of God so as to remain constantly in obedience to it. For we saw in the second chapter of Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 2:10, 11,) that the Gentiles were obstinate in their madness. Although that was not praiseworthy, yet God deservedly blames his people because they held him in less honor than the Gentiles did their idols. For we know how obstinately the nations were fixed in their superstitions, for they did not change their religion except by some violent impulse, just as if heaven and earth were shaken together. Since, therefore, the religion of each was firm and fixed, God accuses the Jews of trifling deservedly, because they inclined towards the errors and madness of the heathen. This, therefore, is Ezekiel's meaning when he says, *the Jews had not done according to the statutes of the Gentiles*: as if he had said, they should have looked at the Gentiles, and as they saw them obstinately worshipping idols, so they should have persisted in my law and in pure worship. But while the obstinacy of the Gentiles was so great that they could not be torn away from their own superstition, my people, says he, have perfidiously declined from me and my law by rash impulse, and without necessity for it. Now, therefore, we perceive why the Prophet adds this to their crimes, that the people had not walked after the judgments or manners of the Gentiles. Hence they might have perceived, that what men had once embraced they ought not lightly to have thrown away, because when we are suddenly and easily turned aside in the matter of the worship of God, it is certain that we have never put forth

living roots. Since, then, the Gentiles instructed the Jews in their duty, their crime became more detestable.

Now follows the threat, that God was prepared to take vengeance. *Behold, I, even, I, am against you* The particle *, gam*, “*even*,” is used as we in French say, *yea, even: I, even I*. We now see that the repetition is emphatic, as if God asserted a horrible destruction to be hanging over the Jews. For he wishes to inspire them with fear, since he assures them that he will prove an avenger. Though I do not receive Jerome’s comment, for he says, that angels and other ministers of God’s wrath are excluded, because God determined to destroy the Jews by himself. This we know to be false, for he made use of the Assyrians and Chaldeans. Since then those people were his scourges, it follows, that angels and men are not excluded when God pronounces himself an avenger. But he increases the weight of the punishment when he says, *I, even I, am he with whom thou shalt have to do* Now he adds, *I will execute judgments*, by which word jurisdiction, as they call it, is intended. What Jerome and those interpreters who follow him affirm is not correct, that by this name God’s justice is asserted, as if he meant, that he would not be cruel in exacting punishment, nor yet unjust nor too rigid. For to execute judgment means merely to exercise jurisdiction, and an earthly judge is said to exercise justice when he sits on his tribunal, even if he perverts justice and equity. This, indeed, cannot be the case with God, although the word allows of it. Besides, there is a suitable antithesis between the doctrinal judgments and the actual ones; God complained that the Jews did not execute his judgments: now he threatens that he himself would execute them, because he will vindicate his law by punishments.

The sum of the whole is *that he will execute judgments in the midst of Jerusalem*, because he will ascend a tribunal and compel the wicked to plead their cause, and to render an account of their life. God, therefore, then executed his judgments when he manifested his vengeance by means of the Chaldeans, and so famine was a part of his punishment, as well as the sword and the pestilence. For while he delays, he seems to have ceased from his duty, and then the impious indulge themselves as if he had forgotten to execute judgment. Therefore, in opposition to this, he denounces *that he would execute judgments*: as if he had said, *I will appear as judge although you think me asleep*. For he says, *he will execute judgments in the midst of Jerusalem, before the eyes of the Gentiles*, by which assertion he means, that their punishments would be remarkable, and such as might be easily considered by all the nations: for we know that the Gentiles were then blind, for they thought that good and evil happened by chance. But God affirms, that his judgments will be so manifest that the blind will be, as it were, eye-witnesses. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 5:9-10

9. And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations.

10. Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their

9. Et faciam in to quae non feci, et quae, non sum facturus secundum hoc amplius, propter cunctas abominationes tuas.

10. Propterea ¹¹⁴ patres vorabunt filios in medio tui, et filii vorabunt patres suos: faciam ergo judicia in to et dispergam cunctas reliquias tuas ad quemlibet ventum.

fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds.

Now God subjoins, that their punishment should be so severe that no similar example could be found in the world — *I will do what I have not done, nor intended to do*, that is, I will avenge your contempt of my law in a striking and unexpected manner; for God sometimes so chastises men as not to exceed the ordinary method. But because punishments seem vile and contemptible when they are so common, God is compelled to surpass the ordinary measure, and to punish the wicked signally and portentously, as he says by Moses. (Deuteronomy 28:46.) When therefore he now says, *that he would do what he had not done before, and what he would not do again*, he signifies a horrible vengeance, which has no similar example. It means nothing else than what, we have quoted from Moses, that the vengeance would be signal and portentous. Interpreters take this metaphorically, but this view cannot be admitted, because in their opinion no history has recorded its fulfillment; hence they fly to allegory and metaphor. But first of all, we know what Josephus says, that mothers were so ravenous that they slew their children and fed upon them, although here a previous siege is referred to, in which God signifies that he would cause fathers to devour their children: I confess it; but even if we receive what they wish, it was not done then; hence Jeremiah is mistaken when he says, that miserable women cooked their children for food. (Lamentations 4:10.) Surely this is a sufficient witness; for to say that we never find that this actually happened is to reject the testimony of Jeremiah. Besides, God had threatened that very thing by Moses; nor can the passage be eluded, because there is weight in the words —

“Men delicate among you, and those accustomed to luxuries,” says he, “shall eat their own children; a man shall envy the wife of his bosom, so that he shall not suffer her to enjoy that nefarious food with him. Then by stealth shall he consume and devour the flesh of his son, so that he shall distribute no part of it to another.” (Deuteronomy 28:54, 55.)

When Moses uses this language he certainly does not mean that there shall be intestine dissensions, so that disciples shall rise up against their masters, and masters oppress their disciples, as Jerome fancies. But it is necessary to take the words as they sound, namely, that God would not be content with common and customary punishments when the Jews had arrived at the very last pitch of impiety and wickedness, since he blames them so severely. Hence Ezekiel now threatens this; nor is it surprising that the Prophets took such forms of expression from Moses, since they used the language of Moses rather than a new one, that the people might not despise their prophesyings. Now, therefore, we must decide, that the Prophet uses these threatenings against the Jews literally. But if any one now object that what God says will not happen does often happen, a solution must be sought for. For we said that when the Jews were besieged by Titus, such a ravenousness attacked certain women, that they fed by stealth on their own children. But God pronounces *that he never would do this again* I reply that this kind of vengeance is not to be restricted to one day, so that God should not often punish the Jews in a similar manner. But we do not read that this was done, except by the Jews, for although this cruelty is related in tragedies — that children were used as food by their parents, yet this barbarity nowhere existed, that a father

¹¹⁴ “Because,” or “on that account.” — Calvin.

knowingly and willingly ate his own son; hence this was peculiar to the Jews. And that God had once executed this vengeance on them by means of the Chaldeans, is no obstacle to his again inflicting the same punishment, when he wished to take vengeance on the extreme rebellion of the people. For although in Ezekiel's time all things were very corrupt, yet we know that when the Son of God was rejected, the Jews cut off from themselves all hope of restoration to the mercy of God. It is not surprising, then, if again he had suffered sons to be devoured by their fathers, as he now threatens that fathers should be so rabid as not even to spare their own bowels.

I know not why Jerome invented this difference, which is altogether futile. For he says, that when a thing is honorable and becoming it should be ascribed to God, but when the thing itself is base, God averts the infamy from himself. For when this wonder is treated of here, God does not say I will cause the people to eat their sons, but he says, fathers shall eat their sons, and sons their fathers. But there is nothing solid in this comment, because the cruelty which the Chaldeans exercised towards the Jews certainly was not either honorable or becoming, and yet God ascribes to himself whatever the Chaldeans did. Again, what was baser than the incest of Absalom, in debauching his father's wives? and even that was not sufficient, but he wished the whole people, at the sound of a trumpet, to be witnesses of his crime; and yet what does God say? "I will do this before the sun," says he. (2 Samuel 12:12, and 2 Samuel 16:21, 22.) We see, then, that this man was not familiar with the Scriptures, and yet that he offered his comments too hastily. There was, indeed, no true religion in the man, and it is not without cause that I admonish you; for there is danger lest many be deceived, if they were not admonished that his genius was full of ostentation and arrogance.

He says, then, *fathers shall eat their sons in the midst of you*, and this was certainly fulfilled: for Jeremiah speaks of women, but he comprehends men also. (Lamentations 4:10.) For he says that women are tender-hearted, he does not say mothers merely, but that they were humane beyond others; but we know that maternal affection is more tender. But when mothers and those tender ones devour their children, that was the final portent. Now he adds, *I will execute, therefore*, (for the copula here ought to be resolved into the expletive particle,) *judgments against thee* That is, in this manner I will really show myself a judge, *and I will scatter all thy remnants unto all winds*. He signifies that there should be such dispersion, that no body or name of the people should remain. But that hope might cherish and sustain the Jews, if any name and body of the people had been left. But when God pronounces that they should be offscourings to be scattered to every wind, he takes away all hope of restoration for the present at least. We know that there was a certain number left, but such destruction was necessarily threatened before God gave any hope of his mercy. When he says, *to any wind*, he signifies in any quarter whatever. For as one or another wind blows so the dust is carried, and the offscourings are dispersed in all directions. It follows —

Ezekiel 5:11

11. Wherefore, *as* I live, saith the Lord GOD; **11.** Propterea vivo *ego*, dicit Dominator
Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary Iehovah, si non propterea quod sanctuarium
with all thy detestable things, and with all thine meum polluisti ¹¹⁵ in omnibus detestationibus

¹¹⁵ That is, "since thou hast polluted my sanctuary." — Calvin

abominations, therefore will I also diminish *thee*; tuis, et omnibus abominationibus tuis: Etiam ego neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have diminuat; ¹¹⁶ et non parcat oculus meus, et etiam any pity ego non miserebor. ¹¹⁷

Here God again expresses more clearly why he was so eager to take vengeance namely, because the religion of the Jews was corrupt, and the Temple had been violated, as we shall see to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since at this time thou hast so familiarly manifested thyself to us in the gospel of Christ our Lord, that we may learn to raise our eyes to the light which has been prepared for us; and grant that we may have them so fixed that we may be directed and urged towards the object of our existence, until the duties of our calling being finished, we may arrive at length unto thee, and enjoy also with thee that glory which thine only-begotten Son acquired for us by his blood. — Amen.

LECTURE FIFTEEN

Yesterday, after Ezekiel had prophesied concerning the slaughter of Jerusalem, he expressed one reason why God was so angry against that city, which he had formerly chosen for his dwelling. He says, *they had violated or polluted his sanctuary* Now therefore we see of what great importance before God is that true and pure religion whose pollution he so severely avenges. And indeed the safety of the city depended solely on the pure worship of God. Therefore the profanation of the Temple was just as if they had rejected God himself, and renounced his aid. Lastly, that impiety sufficiently shows that they despised whatever God had promised them. And these words are to be marked, where he says, *even I will diminish thee, and my eye shall not spare, and I will not pardon*, because nothing is more precious to God than that worship which he has commanded: when his sanctuary is polluted, it is no wonder if he is thus angry. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 5:12

12. A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be peribunt in medio tui: et tertia pars per gladium consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part cadent in circuitu tuo, et tertiam partem in shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I quemlibet ventum dispergam, et gladium will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I evaginabo post eos. will draw out a sword after them.

¹¹⁶ Others translate, "I will break thee in pieces." — Calvin

¹¹⁷ "I will not pardon." — Calvin.

Now he explains without a figure what he had previously proposed figuratively. For he had been commanded to shave off the hairs of his head and of his beard with a razor, and to divide them so that the pestilence should consume one part, the sword another, and the famine a third. Now he repeats the same thing but in another manner. Hence God explains why he had offered a vision of this kind to his servant. But he shortens what we formerly saw, because he omits the fourth member; for he was commanded to take some portion and to hide it under his armpit, or in the hem of his garment: but here there is no mention of that part, and yet it was not spoken in vain, but God speaks in various manners, and that by his own right. Meanwhile, both the figure and its application agree, because God was consuming the whole people by either famine, pestilence, or the sword. What was said concerning the fourth part was not in vain, but it was not necessary to repeat it. To this end then the Prophet tended, since some were survivors it might seem that they were exempt from the common slaughter: that he might take away that hope, he said, that they also, or at least many of them, should perish by burning, so that they should light up a fire in the whole people of Israel. For it happened through the unconquerable obstinacy of the people, that the wretched exiles were more hated; those who had already spared them began afresh to rage against them with cruelty, because the name of the people became detestable among all men. Because, therefore, the remnant of the citizens who remained at Jerusalem perished, hence it happened that the burning penetrated to the ten tribes, and to those wretched exiles who were captives in remote lands. But now our Prophet is silent on this point. In the meanwhile, he comprehends whatever we saw before, although more briefly: only that explanation was wanting, which, although it was formerly useful, yet ought not of necessity to be repeated. *A third part, therefore, shall die by pestilence, and shall perish by hunger in the midst of thee; then a third part shall perish by the sword around thee, and a third part shall be scattered towards every wind:* although God claims this for himself, *I will scatter,* says he, *the third part, and draw out the sword after them,* so that they also shall perish in their dispersion. Now that dispersion is by itself miserable, but God pronounces that he would not be content with that moderate punishment until he utterly consumed them. It follows —

Ezekiel 5:13

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| <p>13. Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I wilt cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I the LORD have spoken <i>it</i> in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them.</p> | <p>13. Et perficietur ira mea, et residere ¹¹⁸ faciem excandescantiam meam in ipsis: et consolationem accipiam: et cognoscent quod ego Iehovah, qui locutus sum in zelo meo ¹¹⁹ cum perfecero excandescantiam meam in ipsis.</p> |
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In this verse the Prophet only teaches what he had said before, but by way of confirmation, namely, that God's vengeance would be horrible and unceasing until the destruction and extinction of the people. There are some who think that this was interposed that God might mitigate the rigor

¹¹⁸ Or, "rest." — Calvin.

¹¹⁹ Or, "in my jealousy." — Calvin.

of his vengeance, and so this verse, according to them, contains a promise of pardon; but it is rather a threat. For what they assert — that God would cause his anger to cease — cannot stand. For it follows afterwards *they shall know that I Jehovah have said it, when I shall have filled up my wrath or anger against them* And the context, as we shall afterwards see, will refute that comment. Let this, then, remain fixed, that the Prophet does not here promise the people any mitigation of their punishment, but goes on denouncing the vengeance which he formerly mentioned.

First he says, *it shall be filled up*: , *keleh*, signifies sometimes “to finish,” but also, “to be accomplished,” “to consume,” and also, “to be consumed.” In this place God signifies that there should be no end to the punishments until he was satisfied. The image is taken from men desirous of vengeance, whose eagerness does not cease till they satiate themselves with revenge. God, therefore, here likens himself to men when he speaks of the end or fulfillment of his anger. Now he adds, *I will cause my fury to rest upon them*, that is, my fury shall be, as it were, fixed upon them. For “rest” is not to be received here for “cease,” for wrath is said to rest when it has spent itself, but God wishes here to mark by his Prophet the perseverance or untiring course of his vengeance. *My wrath, therefore, shall rest upon them*, that is, it shall not remove or pass away; for God is said to withdraw his hand when he ceases to punish us, but here the rest of his wrath is its perpetual continuing. He adds, *I will take comfort* Here God transfers to himself what properly does not belong to him, for he does not delight himself after the manner of men when he takes vengeance on wickedness; but we know that God’s judgment cannot be comprehended, unless he puts on the character of man, and in some manner transforms himself. Hence he is said to *receive comfort* in the approbation of just judgment. For this comfort signifies, that God cannot bear the contempt of his law — then that the malice of man is so desperate, that the judge must at length appear in his own nature; not that he indulges in any passions, as is sufficiently known, but because we cannot otherwise conceive him to be a just judge, unless he declare himself pleased with vengeance, when he sees men so utterly abandoned and beside themselves, as not to be otherwise recalled to penitence.

He afterwards adds, *and they shall know that I Jehovah have spoken it* Here God obliquely blames the stupidity of the people, because they not only despised all prophecies, but also proudly laughed at his threats. As often, then, as the Prophets declared the vengeance and judgments of God, they gave material for laughter to a perverse and impious people, and their obstinacy so blinded them that they did not think it was God who spoke; for they supposed that men only would be their adversaries, and hence their rage against the Prophets. For if they had thought that they had spoken by divine inspiration, they would never have dared to rise against them so madly; but because they thought that the Prophets uttered in public their own comments, therefore they strove with them in forgetfulness of God. The Jews, therefore, did not acknowledge him. But let us mark the source of their ignorance: they turned aside their senses from God of their own accord, as at this time many do not think that God speaks when his truth is openly shown from the Scriptures. Why do they not think so? because they are unwilling. Hence this blindness was voluntary and affected, so to speak, in the ancient people, since they imagined that the prophecies would be without effect. This is the reason why the Prophet says, *then they shall know that I have spoken*, because, as the proverb is, experience is the fool’s teacher; since, therefore, they rejected all threats, it came to pass that, by the teaching of calamity, they perceived too late that God was the speaker. And so there is an antithesis between experimental knowledge, and blindness which arises from an evil disposition and a contempt of God. For when he says, *they shall know when he has fulfilled his wrath*, that knowledge shall be too late and unfruitful. Lastly, God here pronounces, that he would inflict just

punishment on their voluntary ignorance, from which the Jews should know, whether they would or not, that the prophecies against which they had closed their eyes had proceeded from himself alone.

He says also, *that he had spoken in his zeal*, or jealousy, because the Prophets were thought to be very furious when they thundered so against the impious. God therefore here acquits those whom we know were commonly esteemed fanatics, and says *that he spoke in his zeal*, because the impious, when they wish to load the servants of God with envy, object that he is mild and merciful, and that it does not accord with his character to speak roughly and sharply. God therefore says that he also uses zeal, or anger, that the Jews might not think his Prophets carried away with inconsiderate zeal and fervor, since we know that they fell into that grievous error. It follows —

Ezekiel 5:14

14. Moreover I will make thee waste, and a **14.** Et ponam to in vastitatem, et opprobrium reproach among the nations that *are* round about inter gentes quae in circuitu tuo sunt, in oculis thee, in the sight of all that pass by. eujusvis transeuntis. ¹²⁰

He explains what we saw before more at length, whence also we understand that in the next verse God had not softened his anger, but proclaimed the ultimate destruction of the nation. He says therefore, *that the Jews shall be desolate*, as they translate it: it also signifies dryness, and hence is the name for a desert. But it suits this place to say, *the Jews shall be laid waste, and a reproach among the nations*: for they were formerly a celebrated nation: God had ennobled them with remarkable gifts, so that they excelled in dignity in the sight of all the nations. Now he says, *they should be like a vast desert, and in utter ruin, and a reproach*; and not only is this rumor spread abroad, but all travelers through that land are witnesses of this reproach. But in the next verse this is followed out more at length.

Ezekiel 5:15

15. So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an **15.** Et eris probrum, et subsannatio, instruction and an astonishment unto the nations castigatio, et stupor gentibus quae in circuitu tuo that *are* round about thee, when I shall execute sunt, dum fecero in to judicia in ira, et judgments in thee in anger and in fury and in excandescencia, et increpationibus furious rebukes. I the LORD have spoken *it*. excandescencia: ego Iehovah locutus sum.

He further explains how the Jews should be devastated and become a reproach among the nations. Now, he does not speak of their dispersion, but uses two words for one idea: he puts *cherepkeh*, which signifies a reproach, and adds *gedopheh*, which signifies a taunt and a

¹²⁰ Or, “traveler.” — Calvin.

mocking: but this could not take place without the slaughter of the people. Unless the profane heathen had some ground for it, there was no reason why they should utter their taunts and hissings against the Jews. Hence destruction and complete slaughter are comprehended under the words *reproach and taunt*, or laughing-stock. But this sentence belongs to the former verse: there it was said, *I will make thee*: here, *thou shalt be*. Meanwhile the execution of God's vengeance is marked; when, therefore, God reproaches us, we are compelled to lie under the power of his hand, because an attempt to resist him is vain. We shall wrestle, indeed, as the ungodly do, but unless we yield willingly, the violence of his power will crush us. Hence we must observe the context: *I will make thee a reproach, and thou shalt be one*, because God signifies that his threats should not be either empty or in vain. He adds, *thou shalt be a correction*: *moser*, signifies discipline and instruction, but is often used for that correction which springs from a sense of God's wrath. When, therefore, God chastises his people, if they repent, they are said to profit by his discipline, since they have learnt themselves to be sinners by the punishments which he has inflicted on them. But he says that the Jews *should be a correction to the profane nations*, because they should grow wise by their punishments; for while we apply examples to our use, this is a timely correction, since we do not wait till God strikes us; but when he takes vengeance on the despisers of his law at a distance, if we are moved by such examples, this is, as I said, correction in good time: for the Prophet now applies it to the nations, not without the disgrace of the elect people: as if he had said that their punishment would be so notorious that the very blind would recognize them, and tremble at the perception of their import.

Afterwards he adds — *in astonishment*. These words, indeed, do not seem sufficiently in agreement with the Jews being *for a wonder and a correction*; but the Prophet does not simply mean that those who perceived the judgment of God should be either stupid or docile, he only means that in God's severity material would be proposed for all, as well of correction as of astonishment, so that they should be horrified when they saw God treating his elect people so harshly. For he adds, *when I shall execute judgments on thee in wrath, and in fury, and in burnings of anger*. He confirms what we saw before, namely, that God's judgment would be remarkable, because he had so long borne with a reprobate people. Since he had so long borne their impiety, he broke forth at length in one impulse, and then exercised the formidable judgment of which he speaks. This is the reason why he says *the nations shall be astonished when I execute my judgments upon thee*. What, then, were these judgments? — in truth, anger, and burning, and furious rebukes. Here the Prophet seems verbose; but he could not be too much so, since the sluggishness of the people was so great that they were not moved by any prophecies. As we have formerly seen, he had been, doubtless, derided by those Jews in Chaldea, who as yet remained at home tranquil, as it were, in their nests. “Does he, the wretched exile, threaten us? let him be content with his own lot: since God has spared us, he seems to be stirred up to vex us by envy alone; but we have no reason to fear the envy of a captive and an exile.” Since, then, the Prophet knew that he was contemptible among the Jews, it was necessary to heap up such forms of speech, that his teaching might have more weight: nor does he look: at the Jews alone, but at those people also who had been dragged into the same exile; for he has to advise them, for the reasons which we have formerly explained. Now, therefore, we understand his meaning when he speaks *concerning anger and burning*, and adds, at the same time, *burning rebukes*. He adds also, *I Jehovah have spoken it*: which he will repeat at the last verse of the chapter. And this confirmation is also very useful, because when both the Israelites and the Jews looked at a mortal and abject man, a captive and a slave of

Ezekiel 5:16

He illustrates the sentiment which we have seen, but not after the manner of rhetoricians, who affect splendor and ornament of speech; but his only design was to penetrate the minds of the people, like stones or iron. This, then, is the reason why he uses such variety here, and adorns his teaching with various figures. For he now compares God to an archer, who points his arrows against them; but he speaks metaphorically concerning the arrows of God; for he calls them *arrows of famine and evil*, that is, deadly and death-bearing. *Since, then, I shall hurl evil arrows against them, they shall cause their destruction*, says he; that is, they shall not escape death, because they shall be struck with mortal wounds. A person might be struck by the blow of an arrow, and yet become convalescent; but God pronounces the arrows of which he speaks deadly, so that whoever is struck by them has no hope of safety left. Besides, *by arrows of famine* we may understand such barrenness of soil as flies, locusts, and other scourges of God — at one time scorching, at another mildew dries up the corn-field, now rains make the wheat rot, now heat burns it up, as many sources of corruption and pestilence as these are to the crops, so many are the arrows of God which transfix men's hearts, and that too by a deadly wound. If so subtle an explanation does not please any one, he is at liberty to take it otherwise; yet if any one properly attends, he will confess that God darts his own arrows as often as he causes famine, or deprives men of sustenance. He adds, *which shall become corruption*. He confirms what we said was denoted by the epithet *hergnim*. He says, therefore, that these arrows would be destructive, because *they should be for perdition and destruction*. Another confirmation follows: *which I will send*, says he, *against them to destroy them*. Here God distinctly affirms that he would dart forth those arrows, and repeats again what we saw before, and that, too, in the same verse. But we have taught you why the Prophet insists, in many words, on a matter by no means obscure. He adds, *and I will multiply famine against them*. Here he signifies that he was armed with different weapons, so that if men perceive themselves to have fallen, they may perceive that God has other hidden weapons, which he has not yet brought into use. By the word “multiply” the Prophet expresses what we have already seen, by means of arrows, for he uses the plural number, but the impious restrict as much as they can the power of God. “If God wills” they say, “he can indeed ruin the corn-fields with continual rain, he can also burn them up by too much heat, if we

122 Or, “destruction.”

have escaped the frost and the hail, the storm, and the rain., and the drought, it will have already gone well with *us*.” Thus the impious harden themselves in their security. And why? because they restrict God’s arrows to a fixed and certain number. This is the reason why he says, *I will multiply famine upon them*; that is, when they think their yearly produce safe, because they have escaped drought, and rain, and mildew, and storm, and hail, I will find, says he, other modes unknown to them, by which I will bring famine upon them. And he expresses one manner of doing so — I will *break the staff of bread*, concerning which form of speaking we have spoken previously. I do not subscribe to their opinion who say, that the staff of bread is broken when God sends a deficiency of corn; for in the greatest plenty the staff of bread is broken, as we saw in Moses, when God takes away the nourishing quality of bread, and makes it vanish, (Deuteronomy 8:3,) because man lives not by bread alone, but by that secret inspiration which God has implanted in the bread. Hence we may eat more than fourfold the usual quantity, and yet not be satisfied, as this form of speech often occurs with the Prophets, which they take from Moses. Thou shalt eat, and not be satisfied, say they. (Leviticus 26:26; Isaiah 9:20; Ezekiel 7; Hosea 4:10; Micah 6:14.) So also here the Prophet repeats what we saw in the last chapter — that God breaks the staff of bread, that is, takes away its nourishing quality, so that he who feeds upon it does not feel that he has recovered new rigor. It follows —

Ezekiel 5:17

17. So will I send upon you famine and evil **17.** Et mittam in vos famem, et bestiam
beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence malam,¹²³ et orbabunt to; ¹²⁴get pestis, et sanguis
and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring transibunt in to, et gladium venire faciam super
the sword upon thee. I the LORD have spoken to: ego Iehovah locutus sum.
it.

Here God speaks generally concerning certain adversities — *I will send evil upon them*, he says, but immediately afterwards he adds the kind of evil, of which he had not yet spoken. Hence, under the name of evil he embraces all adversities, as if he had said that he intended to exact the penalty from the wicked, not in one or two ways only, but by those numberless troubles which surround us, and to which we are subject; so that there would be no bounds to his wrath, unless men should cease to provoke his anger. This is the reason, then, why he now speaks generally concerning evil; but as I have said he adds the kind of evil — *An evil beast shall come upon thee, and so I will bereave thee* Although only one form of evil is expressed, yet it is by no means doubtful that for the sake of example God mentions this, that they might understand that all injuries are in his hand. And these are numberless. If we look upwards, how many deaths hang over us from that direction? If we look at the earth, how many poisons? how many wild and fierce beasts, how many serpents, swords, pitfalls, stumbling-blocks, *precipices*, falls of houses, throwings of stones and darts? In short, we cannot stir a step without ten deaths meeting us. So God here speaks of wild beasts only

¹²³ Or, “wild beast” — Calvin.

¹²⁴ “He used before the plural number” — Calvin.

for the purpose of showing that *they* were at hand, and that by them he would execute his judgments. Now, therefore, we understand why Ezekiel first spoke of the *genus*, and afterwards came to the *species*.

And at length he adds, *I will bereave* or deprive them, namely, that he will deprive fathers of their sons, and sons of their fathers; and he will do that, not only by cruel and savage beasts, but by various other ways. Again he repeats — *pestilence and blood shall pass over thee*. He had not spoken of blood before, unless under the name of the sword, which he repeats again: but he heaps together, as I have said, various forms of speech, so that those should be at length awakened who had been too slow, and were afterwards turning themselves willingly away from all sense of the wrath of God. Hence he says, *pestilence and blood shall pass through thee*. Then, *I will bring a sword*, says he, *upon thee*. When he spoke of blood, he really intended a sword, but, as I have already said, this did not cause either the Israelites or Jews instantly to tremble at such threats. What, therefore, was in itself sufficiently clear and easy, ought to be impressed in various ways. With this view he adds again, *I Jehovah have spoken*. For he turns away the Jews and Israelites from looking at himself, and shows them that he was not the author of the threats, but that he faithfully delivers what he had received from God's hand, and what he was commanded to utter against them.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since we are so dull and heavy, that we may awake in time at thy threats, and submit ourselves to thy power, that we may not experience by our destruction how formidable it is, but profit under thy rod when thou correctest us like a father, and may we so become wise, that through the whole course of our life we may proceed in the continual pursuit and meditation of true repentance; and having put off the vices and filth of the flesh, we may be reformed into true purity, until at length we arrive at the enjoyment of celestial glow, which is laid up for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE SIXTEENTH

CHAPTER 6

Ezekiel 6:1-3

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| <p>1. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,</p> <p>2. Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them,</p> <p>3. And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD</p> | <p>1. Et fuit sermo Iehovæ ad me dicendo,</p> <p>2. Fili hominis, pone faciem tuam ad ¹²⁵ montes Israel, et prophetiza ad eos,</p> <p>3. Et dic, Montes Israel audite sermonem Dominatoris Iehovæ: sic dicit Dominator Iehovah montibus et collibus, rivis ¹²⁶ et vallibus: ecce ego adducem contra vos gladium, et perdam excelsa places.</p> |
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The Prophet now turns himself to the kingdom of Israel, since he had formerly spoken concerning the Jews alone. He says that he was *divinely sent to the mountains of Israel*. The first question may arise about the time; for the kingdom of Israel had been cut off, and the ten tribes dragged into exile- and the kingdom had come to an end in Ezekiel's time. The time, therefore, does not seem to accord with the denunciation of the Prophet as to what had happened many years previously. But nothing will appear out of place, if we say that it was partly prophecy and partly doctrine, so that the Israelites might understand why they were driven out of their country, and dispersed among the nations. I say that God's plans were partly explained to the exiles, that they might know why God had driven them to distant lands: for this punishment would not have been useful had not God convinced them of its cause. But although the kingdom had fallen, it is probable that some of the people were remaining: for the Assyrian did not carry off so many thousand men, and his kingdom would have been burdened by such a multitude. Doubtless he collected the flower of the people, and permitted the commonalty to remain there: for he sent from his own kingdom inhabitants for the deserted soil. But the change was great and ruinous to the king himself, and vexatious to all alike. Although, therefore, the kingdom did not exist any longer — nay, even the name of Israel was almost extinct, because there was no mass of people, and they dwelt in their country like foreigners and guests, yet there was still some portion of them left. Now, we collect from the words of the Prophet that they were obstinate, because they were not induced by either the exile of their brethren, or their own calamity, to leave their own superstitions, and embrace the true and pure worship of God.

Since, therefore, this chastisement did not profit them, hence the Prophet is ordered to preach *against them*. It is ascertained from the first chapter that Ezekiel received this command after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, (Ezekiel 1:1, 2) for he said that he was divinely stirred up in the thirtieth year after the jubilee, and in the fifth year of the captivity of Jechoniah or Joachim. It is evident, therefore, that the Prophet spake against the land of Israel after the ten tribes had been

¹²⁵ Or, "against." — Calvin.

¹²⁶ "Some translate 'torrents;' others, 'the rushing down of waters;' others, 'rocks.'" — Calvin.

dispersed. Hence we may elicit that there were still many people there, because it would have been difficult for the Assyrians to receive all the people, and those who remained alive in the country went on in their own abominations, so that it became necessary for some other judgment to be denounced against them, on which we are about to enter. Now, therefore, this principle is established, that the Prophet so treats the slaughter of the kingdom of Israel, that he predicts as about to come to pass what those left in the country by no means feared; for they were persuaded that they were free from all dangers. But the Prophet shows that God's wrath was not yet complete, but that their former calamities were only a prelude, and that heavier woes were at hand, because they had so hardened themselves against the power of God. The prophecy, too, has greater weight when the Prophet addressed the mountains than when his discourse was directed to men. So that Ezekiel is not ordered to exhort the Israelites to penitence, and to threaten them with the punishment which still remained, but he is ordered to turn his discourse *to hills, and mountains, and valleys*. Thus God obliquely signifies, first, that the Israelites were deaf, and then unworthy of the trouble which Ezekiel would spend in teaching them. Thus the Prophet sent to Jeroboam did not design to address him, but turning to the altar —

“O altar, altar,” says he, “thus saith Jehovah, Behold a son shall be born to the family of David, by name Josiah, and he shall slay upon thee the priests of the high places, and shall burn upon thee the bones of the dead.” (1 Kings 13:2.)

The king was burning incense on the altar, the prophet does not regard him, but as I have just said, directs his discourse to the altar: that was far more vehement than if he had reproved the king sharply. For that was no common reproof, to pass by the king as if he had been only the shadow of a man, and to admonish the dead altar concerning a future event: so also in this place: *Son of man, set thy face against the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them*. The Prophet might object that the mountains had no ears, and hence that it was only child's play. But he understood God's intention, and so obeyed cheerfully, because he saw the people despised and rejected by God because they were deaf and incurable, and meanwhile he knew that his labor would not be lost although he addressed the mountains. For we know that the earth was created for the use of man, and hence God proposes to us examples of his wrath in brutes, trees, the atmosphere, and the heavens, that we may know that admonitions belonging to us are engraven there, although in every other way God turns away his eyes and his face. This, therefore, is a sign of his wrath, when God shows his judgments on all sides, and yet is silent towards us, because we gather from this that we are unworthy of any trouble for our improvement, and this was doubtless the Prophet's conclusion.

Now a clearer expression follows in the third verse: *Thou shalt say, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord*. Here an audience is required of the mountains which they could not give, but that has respect to mankind, as I have just said. God, therefore, requires the mountains to listen, so that men may understand that an inanimate thing may be endued with sense, if their stupidity is considered. For at length God enforced his judgments against the mountains of Israel. Although, therefore, they could not hear the Prophet speaking, yet they took up his instruction, because it was efficacious in them, and God at length in reality proved that he had not spoken in vain. The event, therefore, openly made the mountains in some way attentive. Neither could they escape the judgment which had been openly denounced. Now he adds, *Thus saith Jehovah to the mountains and the hills*. Ezekiel now addresses not mountains only, as he had been commanded: hence he seems to exceed the prescribed command, for he had been sent to mountains and hills only, but now he says, *hear ye mountains, hear ye hills, hear ye valleys*. But we said yesterday that

prophets sometimes speak briefly, and sometimes explain more fully what they had uttered but shortly. God, therefore, at the beginning spoke only of mountains, but he doubtless comprehended valleys, and the flowing down of rivers, because the Prophet only explains what he had said in one word: hence he speaks to *mountains and hills*, and then to *the pouring down of waters or torrents*. Jerome translates it rocks, and the Hebrews call whatever is violent , *aphik*, hence when there is any violent course they use this word; and so we may understand in this place either rocks or flowing down of waters or torrents, no matter which. But since he afterwards adds valleys, this explanation is to me probable, that the Prophet indeed understands either torrents or the rushing down of waters. Here we must also remark, that those parts are marked out where the Israelites had *erected* perverse and adulterous worship: for we know that mountains were filled with superstitions, and so also valleys, though the reason was different: for when they erected their altars on the mountains they thought themselves near God, but when they descended into the valleys, their rites were thus performed in shade and obscurity, and thus they thought themselves in this way hidden as it were in a sanctuary. It is sufficiently known that they exercised their idolatries in the mountains as well as the valleys. This, therefore, is the reason why the Prophet here shows that the whole land of Israel was polluted with defilement. *Behold*, says he, *I bring a sword against you*. Hence we infer that when the Prophet addresses the mountains, yet he speaks for the sake of man. For the sword could not injure the mountains: for one stone would break a hundred, nay a thousand swords, and yet remain entire. God, therefore, had threatened the mountains with slaughter in vain, nay, when mention is made of the sword, we know that death is understood: for the cause is put for the effect. Hence God addresses men indirectly, but when he directs his discourse to the mountains he shows that men themselves are deaf, and therefore turns away his face from them, and addresses mute elements and inanimate things: *and I will destroy*, says he, *your lofty things*. He now explains what I have taught before, that mountains, and hills, and valleys, and descending waters are named, because perverse and impure worship flourished there. For by “*lofty things*,” the Spirit doubtless intends whatever the Israelites had mixed of their own imaginations to corrupt the worship of God. They properly call altars *lofty*, because they were erected in high and conspicuous places. But the species is here put for the genus. Meanwhile, God signifies that he so abominates all fictitious worship that he cannot bear the sight of the places. The stones indeed of which the altars were built we know to be harmless: for places are not polluted by idolatry of their own will; for as far as the world was created by God it always retains its own nature, but as far as man is *concerned*, the places themselves were polluted, and the contagion renders them hateful to God. Hence this is put for the detestation of idolatry. He continues the same sentiment, and first denounces that altars should be laid waste. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 6:4

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| <p>4. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain <i>men</i> before your idols.</p> | <p>4. Et desolabuntur altaria vestra, et conterentur idola vestra, et cadere faciam occisos coram idolis vestris.</p> |
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¹²⁷ Or, “I will lay prostrate ” — Calvin.

Hence it appears how greatly obedience pleases God, and how true it is that it is better than sacrifices. (1 Samuel 15:22; 1 Kings 12.) For it is certain that the *Israelites* extolled their own fictions exorbitantly, as if they were worshipping God *correctly*. In the beginning, indeed, Jeroboam cunningly devised those new rites, that he might alienate the ten tribes from the family of David, and at length the error spread, so that they thought that God approved that impious worship. But we see that God abominates them. We should always hold this principle, that although men think that they obey God when they thrust in their own fictions, yet they produce no other effect than to provoke the wrath of God against them. This vengeance, therefore, had not been taken against altars, unless God had been greatly offended with the impious mixture. *Your altars, therefore, shall come to ruin and destruction, and then your idols shall be destroyed.* Here some understand the idols of the sun, as the noun is taken from heat, which is afterwards repeated: but this divination seems to be too contracted. Hence I do not doubt that the idols are so called on account of the mad love with which the worshippers were seized: for throughout the Prophets they are said to be like adulterers, and our Prophet also uses the same language. Idols therefore may very properly derive their name from heat, because their superstitious worshippers inflame themselves with love, and like adulterers run after harlots, as we shall again see. He afterwards uses another word, when he says, *I will lay prostrate your slain before your idols*: for they call idols *gelolim*, on account of their foulness, nay even filth. We see then in the first place that the fury with which the Israelites were inflamed is condemned by the Prophet, since they perverted the pure and lawful worship of God: then he reproves their enormity because they willingly remained in filth and defilement. But here also we are taught how mightily God is angry with all superstitions, when he not only cites mankind to his tribunal because they profane true piety, but is angry with external instruments — as stones and wood, and, as it were, involves these instruments of idolatry with their authors. It follows —

Ezekiel 6:5

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| <p>5. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars.</p> | <p>5. Et ponam cadavera filiorum Israel coram idolis vestris, et spargam ossa vestra in circuitu altarium vestrorum.</p> |
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By these words the Prophet signifies that God's wrath would be manifest, because he impresses certain marks by which it may be judged that the Israelites had provoked his anger; because they had departed from the pure and genuine order of the law. He says, therefore, *I will place the carcasses of the sons of Israel before their idols*, when the carcasses were so mingled with the idols, hence it appeared that God was greatly offended. For we know that it was detestable in all sacrifices that either human bones or carcasses should be joined with the victims: so that the religion of the Israelites

¹²⁸ "The relation is in the third person." — Calvin.

¹²⁹ "He returns again to the second person" — Calvin.

was openly condemned by this sign, so that unless they had been utterly blind, they would acknowledge all their worship to have been abominable. We understand, therefore, the design of God when he says, *that he would cast the carcasses of the sons of Israel before their idols*: as if he had said, I will defile all your rites which seem to you sacred, and I will make them stink even before the unbelievers. But how? for the altar is polluted by contact with a carcass; but the carcasses shall be cast there, that the contagion may spread to the altars. *And I will sprinkle*, says he, *your bones around your altars*. Lastly, he signifies that he would profane those sacred rites which the Israelites had fabricated for themselves with their carcasses: by which he understands that they would be doubly disgraced whilst they defiled by their pollutions what they had thought beautiful. The Prophets constantly proclaimed that these rites were folly and an abomination, but still those who were attached to those superstitions pleased themselves. When, therefore, God's servants effected nothing by their sacred admonitions, at length a real and actual proof was added, when their altars were polluted, and that, too, with their own defilement. For in this God's remarkable vengeance appeared, as I have formerly said.

Ezekiel 6:6

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| <p>6. In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolabuntur: ¹³⁰ et excelsa in vastitatem desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and redigentur, ut vastentur et desolentur ¹³¹ altaria made desolate, and your idols may be broken and vestra, et conterantur, et cessent ¹³² idola vestra, cease, and your images may be cut down, and et excidantur idola vestra, et deleantur opera your works may be abolished.</p> | <p>6. In omnibus habitationibus vestris urbes be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolabuntur: ¹³⁰ et excelsa in vastitatem desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and redigentur, ut vastentur et desolentur ¹³¹ altaria made desolate, and your idols may be broken and vestra, et conterantur, et cessent ¹³² idola vestra, cease, and your images may be cut down, and et excidantur idola vestra, et deleantur opera your works may be abolished.</p> |
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In other words, the Prophet signifies that God would take vengeance on the superstitions of the ten tribes in all places; whence it is *clear*, that no corner was free from corruption. For, while he names all habitations, he means that they had defiled every habitable place. Wheresoever they dwelt they had erected their altars and strange worship, as another Prophet reproves them; according to the number of your cities were your Gods. (Jeremiah 2:28; Jeremiah 11:13.) He addresses the Jews there, but the meaning is the same. Hence the Prophet signifies, that it was not a single part only that was polluted with their idolatries, but their filth was spread abroad through the whole land wherever there were any inhabitants. *In all your habitations*, therefore, *the cities shall be deserted*. When he threatens destruction and desolation to the cities, he means what I have just said, that those places were corrupted by impious superstitions. He adds, *and thy high places shall be destroyed* or made desolate. Here he explains himself more clearly, that the cities should be reduced to solitude, because their religion was corrupt, and the inhabitants were given up to their own fictions and idolatries. He adds therefore high places to cities, that he may point out the reason of the cities perishing. He adds, *that they may be desolate* or reduced to a desert: it is again the word , *chereb*,

¹³⁰ That is, "in every habitable region they will be deserted." This word we have illustrated before — Calvin.

¹³¹ Or, "shall be destroyed and perish." — Calvin.

¹³² Or, "abolished," the same word for idols which is derived from heat. — Calvin.

and your altars may perish. He confirms the same doctrine, namely, that he was so hostile to the cities of Israel because they were all polluted with profane and strange altars. For, as we have said, God had chosen that land to himself, and so all its cities were dedicated to his glory. This, then, might move us to wonder why he threatened them with destruction; for we might readily answer this by saying his counsel was changed. But the Prophet shows, that although the cities themselves were pleasing to God, yet they were hated by him through the corruptions by which they were polluted. Hence he joins high places to altars. Hence a probable conjecture is elicited, that the Israelites did not sacrifice wherever they had erected high places. They had then their own high places when they worshipped false gods, and also their own altars. And since the worship of God was vitiated in both ways, the Prophet, as I have said, here joins them both.

At length he adds, *and your idols shall be broken up and cease*, or be abolished. Again he uses that reproachful word which I have said is taken from the stench of dung. (Luke 16:15.) But it signifies that which is highly esteemed among men is abominated by God, especially when it is worshipped. *And your idols*, says he, *shall be cut off.* I have said that this word is derived from heat. It means, that the idols were the cause of their madness, since the Israelites were so corrupted with impure love that they deserted God and looked only at the idols: but he compares the zeal with which idolaters are maddened to impure and brutal lust. At length he adds, *your works shall be destroyed.* Here he uses a general name, and significantly points out the difference between the pure worship of God and all corruptions. There is no need of a long discussion if we desire to know how God is to be worshipped. For he rejects and excludes our works. If, therefore, we do not obtrude our works, but only follow what God demands, our worship will be pure, but if we add anything of our own, it is an abomination. We see, therefore, that useful instruction can be collected from one word, namely, that all worship is perverse and disapproved by God when men bring anything forward of themselves. For by works he does not here understand idols made of either wood, or stone, or brass, or gold, or silver, but it comprehends likewise whatever men have fashioned, and whatever can be ascribed to them, because they have not taken them from the mouth of God and the commands of his law.

Ezekiel 6:7

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| <p>7. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I <i>am</i> the LORD.</p> | <p>7. Et cadet interfectus in medio vestri: et cognoscetis quod Ego Iehovah.</p> |
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Here the Prophet adds a small clause to his former threats, namely, that God would so consume the whole people with slaughter, that they would be compelled to acknowledge him as Jehovah. *The slain*, therefore, *shall fall in the midst of thee*, that is, the enemy shall arise who shall cause slaughter everywhere through the midst of the land. As to the phrase, *I am Jehovah*, it refers to the prophecy; for the Israelites did not openly deny God, but because they had no faith in the words of the Prophet, hence God appears and confirms and establishes the authority of the prophetic teaching, when he shows that an avenger was at hand if it was despised, as we know it was despised; and this he will soon explain a little more clearly. It follows now —

Ezekiel 6:8

8. Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may **8.** Et residuum faciam, ¹³³ ut sint vobis qui have *some* that shall escape the sword among the evadant gladium in gentibus, cum dispersi fueritis nations, when ye shall be scattered through the per terras. countries.

Yet here another promise is added, which may temper the bitterness of so sorrowful a prophecy. For hitherto God shows that he burns with indignation against the land of Israel, so that he determined to destroy it, since it was polluted everywhere, and at all corners. Nothing could therefore be hoped for, if Ezekiel had spoken precisely; therefore a promise is added in mitigation — *I will leave a remnant, says he, that you may have some who escape the sword*; that is, that some of you may survive. But how? God does not promise simple pardon, that he may leave the Israelites quiet and safe in the land, but he says that their safety shall be in exile. Hence therefore we collect that they were so depraved that they were unable to obtain pardon, because God says that his *patience* was their scorn and aversion. Although, therefore, he gives the Israelites some hope of favor, yet he also admonishes them that they could not obtain safety in any other way, except by a kind of death, namely exile. *I will leave a remnant, says he, of you, who shall escape the sword*; but how? whom shall the enemy have spared so that they do not change their place? nay, he says, *when ye shall be dispersed among the Gentiles* He promises them life, therefore, but a wretched one, because it was united with exile. But God's favor cannot be sufficiently estimated from these words, unless what follows immediately is added.

Ezekiel 6:9

9. And they that escape of you shall **9.** Et recordabuntur qui ex vobis evaserint remember me among the nations whither they mei in gentibus, apud quas captivi fuerint illic ¹³⁴ shall be carried captives, because I am broken quia frangar ad cor ipsorum quod fornicatur, ¹³⁵ with their whorish heart, which hath departed a quod recessit a me, et ad oculos ipsorum from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring scortantes ¹³⁶ post idola sua, et pudificent coram after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves facie sua super malis quae fecerunt in omnibus for the evils which they have committed in all abominationibus suis. their abominations.

I see that I cannot finish, and I think the time is advancing.

¹³³ "It is one word — 'I will leave remaining.'" — Calvin.

¹³⁴ "The adverb of place is redundant" — Calvin.

¹³⁵ "That is, which burns with adultery." — Calvin.

¹³⁶ "Or full of lust" — Calvin.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou desirest a continual memorial of thy former remarkable judgments on thy people, that we may this day restrict ourselves to thy pure worship — grant, I say, that we may be teachable by thee, and never attempt to adulterate thy worship by our devices; and since thou hast clearly manifested thy will to us, through thine only-begotten Son, that we may remain in obedience to him, and may so invoke Thee the Father, in his name, while we are pilgrims in the world, until at length we arrive at that blessed inheritance which is laid up for us in heaven by the same, our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE SEVENTEENTH.

In the last lecture I only recited the ninth verse, but did not explain it; for the Lord says, *he would afterwards make some part of Israel a remnant*, since he hoped they would profit by the chastisement: *then, says he, the remnant will remember me*. By these words he obliquely reproves the sluggishness of the ten tribes, who could never be brought to any sense of God's anger, unless by experiencing it. For there is an opposition between remembrance and forgetfulness, since he says they would remember after they were afflicted, he signifies that during their prosperity they were drowned in *negligence* and contempt. We may learn from this that God's chastisements are very useful to us, because when he indulges us we abuse his kindness, and flatter ourselves so as to become hardened in sin. It is necessary, therefore, nay, even useful, that those who indulge themselves in their vices, should be chastised, and although the Lord can recall us to himself in other ways, yet our weakness is so great that we always grow torpid in our sins, until his chastisements draw us back to life. Besides, we must also observe, that; all are not permitted to become wise again, even when chastised by God. And the Prophet does not speak generally, but marks out the survivors, or those who shall have been preserved. *phlitikem*, says he, that is, those of you who shall be saved; but this was only a small portion, as we have seen. Now as the difference is sought for between the few permitted to escape, and the multitude which perished, none other will be found, except because it pleased God to preserve a seed. All were worthy of death; he consumed almost the whole body of the people; he wished a small number to remain safe. We see, therefore, that the safety of those of whom the Prophet now speaks flowed from the mere mercy of God. Besides, what I have said must be borne in mind — that none repented but those to whom it was given; whence it follows, that repentance is a singular gift of God. And we see that many plunge into a worse state, nay, even rage against God when he chastises them: first they roar, then they are outrageous, then they rush on to unbridled madness, so that they would be prepared to wage war with God, if they could penetrate as far as the heavens. Since therefore chastisements are common to the elect and the reprobate, and yet some go on to rage more and more against God, it follows that it is not permitted to all to repent when God admonishes them, cites them to his tribunal, and demands punishment for their sins when they displease him.

This therefore is the reason why the Prophet restricts this promise to those who should be saved out of the whole people. He had said they should be preserved, because God was unwilling to extinguish the whole Church, that he might not destroy his covenant, which ought to be perpetual and inviolable. He says *among the Gentiles*, among whom, or where, *they were captives* Here also the Prophet signifies that exile would be useful to the Israelites, because as long as God suffered

them to possess the Holy Land, they provoked him as if on purpose. Since, therefore, they so polluted God's worship in the Holy Land, he ought long ago to have destroyed them. And the Prophet signifies this when he says, *among the nations where they were captives* they would then return to a sound mind, though they had been obstinate in the region assigned them by God. It follows *that he was broken down*, or worn down, *through their heart*. There may be a double sense of the words. The first is, that God was at length conquered by their wickedness, after he had found that he did not profit by bearing them patiently. For when he sees that his favor becomes a laughing-stock, he is the more angry, and deservedly so. Thus, therefore, this passage may be conveniently explained, *that God was broken on account of the adulterous heart of the Israelites*; because when he had long suffered them to sin with impunity, yet when he saw no end to it, being conquered, as it were, by their obstinacy, he descends to punish them. But we may also refer this to pardon, because they will acknowledge that God is broken through their heart, because he wishes to pardon them. For he is said to be broken who voluntarily forgives injuries; and since there are many tender and kind, who willingly pardon their enemies for even the greatest crimes. And this explanation is in some degree suitable, because the sinner cannot really remember God, without perceiving some taste of his goodness, so that he hopes he will be propitious to him. Yet the first sense seems more suitable, that the Israelites will begin to remember when they were dragged into exile, that just punishment awaited them, because God had borne with them patiently, and had not treated them at once with the utmost rigor, but when compelled, he descended at length to take vengeance, after he was broken down or worn down by their desperate wickedness. Now, therefore, we understand the Prophet's intention. Hence also we gather, that those who seriously repent do not acknowledge their fault lightly, but think within themselves in what ways, and how long, and how perversely, they have provoked God's wrath. The Prophet expresses this by the word *breaking*. God, therefore, did not treat the Israelites so harshly, while he was offended by their wickedness, but at length he was broken by their hardness.

He says, *Through their adulterous heart which departed from me, and through their adulterous eyes after their idols*. This image occurs everywhere throughout the Prophets; and because I have often explained it, I now pass it slightly by. For the superstitious are said to commit whoredom with their idols, that all idolatry may be rendered more detestable. For those who adulterate the worship of God by their fictions, yet think that they offer an acceptable obedience. Since, therefore, the blind and unbelieving so please themselves by their corruptions, hence Scripture compares them to adulterers. The name of devotion among the Papists is at this time so plausible that it buries all the light of sound doctrine. For by this one word they reject whatever is offered them in the law and the gospel: and so also concerning "good intentions" as they call them. Since, therefore, the incredulous so intoxicate themselves with their own comments, God distinctly mentions fornicators, and says, that all who recede from the pure rule of the law contaminate themselves with debaucheries. At the same time, as I have often said, the prophets allude to a sacred and spiritual marriage in which God has bound himself to his Church. For chastity of soul means the pure worship of God. When, therefore, men fall off from that sincerity, it is just as if a woman should desert her husband and follow adulterers. Now that the Prophet may express this mad desire more clearly, he adds eyes to the heart. By these words he understands furious lust, not only because they were devoted to their idols with all their heart, but they were drawn that way by their eyes, as if their eyes had been torches to inflame their mind. He retains, however, his own image, because adulterers by their

wandering glances generate the flames of lust, and so their heart is set on fire. For this reason therefore he says, *they were adulterous both in eye and heart*

Afterwards he adds, *and they shall become ashamed*, or shall be cut off *in their faces*, that is, before their face: others translate, they shall feel nausea, which seems rather too rough. But because the word , *ket*, signifies to spew out, those who use a word of abomination render the Prophet's sense faithfully. *They shall be therefore*, says he, *an abomination to themselves* Those who translate it, "They shall be cut off," also receive the word metaphorically; for he who suffers so much shame that he scarcely dares to look on heaven and men, is said to be cut off. But others translate, they shall contend or quarrel before their eyes. But since that signification is rarer, I scarcely dare subscribe to their opinion, especially when the best sense is, that they should be abominable to themselves. Therefore, *they shall be rejected before their face*, that is, they shall not wait till men condemn them or until others reprove their perverse worship, but they shall willingly abominate themselves. Now the Prophet shows that their penitence is real, because it may happen that a person may feel that he has some dealing with God, and yet not be truly humbled: just as Cain was compelled to tremble at the sight of God, yet was always like himself. (Genesis 4:9.) So it usually happens to all the wicked. The acknowledgment of this judgment of God is indeed some portion of repentance, but only half: wherefore the Prophet, that he may show the Israelites that they would remember God not without fruits when his hand was upon them, adds, that they should be abominable to themselves. This displeasure is then the second part of repentance. He says, *for the evils which they have done in all their abominations* The Prophet expresses more clearly, that the veil by which the eyes of the Israelites had been so long covered should be removed when they returned to God. For escape from punishment causes men to connive at their sins, as if a veil had been placed over their eyes, and they imagine that what God not only rejects but even detests is honorable. But when God by the infliction of punishment forces the wretched to perceive this, and no longer to put light for darkness and darkness for light, then they begin to be displeased with themselves. Now it follows

Ezekiel 6:10

10. And they shall know that I *am* the LORD, **10.** Et cognoscent quod ego Iehovah non
and that I have not said in vain that I will do this frustra locutus fuerim ad faciendum malum
evil unto them. hoc.¹³⁷

He now mentions the fruit of their repentance, because the Israelites were beginning at length to attribute just honor to his prophecies. For we know that they trifled carelessly while the Prophets were threatening them. Because, therefore, they were in the habit of destroying confidence in all the servants of God, and of reducing as it were their truth to nothing, the Prophet says, that when they repented they would then perceive that God had not spoken in vain. While they were despising his threats, they did not perceive that they ought therefore to be considered despisers of God. For

¹³⁷ "That is, in making them bear this evil, or slaughter, or penalty: for 'evil' is not to be taken here for unjust violence, but only for adversity." — Calvin.

listening only to men, when they heard Jeremiah or Ezekiel, they thought that they were contending with them only, and could do so with impunity against mere mortals. God therefore, in opposition to this, testifies that he was the chief author. For as error springs from error, they proudly rejected whatever the Prophets said, when they treated it as frivolous and vain. God therefore says: *They shall then know that I have not spoken in vain, when I bring upon them this evil* This knowledge, which is produced by real dissatisfaction with self, is very useful. I have said that it is the fruit of repentance, but at the same time it profits the miserable, to humble themselves seriously before God, and to call to memory their own ingratitude: then they perceive what they had never admitted before, that God is trustworthy as well in his threats as in his promises. Hence it happens that they reverently embrace his word which they had formerly despised. He pronounced the same thing previously concerning the reprobate, who, as we have already said, feel God's hand without producing fruit. But because he now speaks of those very few whose conversion he had previously praised, he doubtless comprehends the fear of God under recognition or perception of him. For if all God's threats had been buried, the people could not be thought to have returned into the right way, nor could their conversion have any existence before God. We know that contempt is not free from impious sacrilege, which is now treated of. Therefore, that the sinner may submit himself sincerely to God, this acknowledgment is required, that he should weigh within himself how unworthily and wickedly he had formerly either repudiated or neglected the word of God. In the meantime the Prophet triumphs over the arrogance of those who had wantonly despised the teaching of all God's servants, when he says, *they shall feel (or acknowledge) that I Jehovah have not spoken in vain* Since, therefore, the Prophet here depicts as in a painting their late repentance, let us learn to tremble in time at God's threats. Although indeed God does not yet execute his vengeance upon us, yet let us be sure that he does not speak in vain, and let us be alarmed as soon as he shows any sign of his indignation. God indeed testifies that he would be propitious to the Israelites, although their repentance was tardy; but as far as we are concerned, let us repent in time, as I have already admonished, and as soon as God utters his threats, let it be to us just as if their execution were at hand. It follows —

Ezekiel 6:11

11. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.

11. Sic dicit Dominator Iehovah, Percute manu tua ¹³⁸ et divarica pedes tuos, ¹³⁹ et dic Hei super omnes abominationes mahas domus ¹⁴⁰ Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.

This confirms what we have formerly seen concerning the slaughter of the ten tribes. The kingdom of Israel had been indeed afflicted, but because those remaining in their own country

¹³⁸ That is, "clap thy hands." — Calvin.

¹³⁹ Or, "extend;" verbally, "extend in thy foot." — Calvin.

¹⁴⁰ Or, "heus, alas!" — Calvin.

thought themselves free from further calamity, and gave themselves up to their idolatries more and more, it was on this account necessary that final destruction should be denounced against them. Since, then, words moved them but little, God adds a sign, according to his custom in obstinate cases. He orders the Prophet, by clapping of hands, and by extending his legs and feet, to show that the land was cursed. *Divide, therefore, thy feet;* for thus men are accustomed to do when they denounce anything gravely, or burn with indignation: they extend their legs in opposite directions; so I have rendered it verbally *separate thy feet:* the clapping of the hands has the same object. God wishes by this gesture that his word should be confirmed, not for the Prophets sake, but for the sake of the obstinacy of those who were deaf to all words, as we have said. Hence we truly comprehend how great was the stupidity of men, who, when God was thundering from heaven, yet remain secure, and do not cease to follow after their own desires: even when God inspires terror, they do nothing but laugh — this is monstrous. And yet we see it was an old disease, and I wish we of this day were free from what Ezekiel experienced.

Lastly, it is just as if he had been commanded to bring the Israelites into his presence. When, therefore, he was commanded to cry *alas!* or, *oh!* upon all the abominations of the house of Israel, there is no doubt that his gesture as well as his exclamation ought to be efficacious. The reason also is added — *that all shall perish by sword, pestilence, and famine*. We have said that these three kinds of punishment are always proposed, not because God strikes the despisers of his law with pestilence, the sword, and famine only, but because this method is more known and more common. God has innumerable hidden methods of punishing transgressors; but since, as I have said, this scourge is more used, hence the Prophets more frequently mention it.

The result is, that destruction to the kingdom of Israel was at hand, which they had never thought of; because God avenges the wickedness of his people not only by war, but by pestilence and famine. Sometimes by the figure, a part for the whole, it comprehends other punishments. And we know with how many miseries war is replete; for when once men begin to take up arms, the gate is opened to robberies and rapines, burnings, slaughters, debaucheries, and all violence; and in war all humanity and equity is buried. Then as to famine, we know that it usually renders men ravenous. But in pestilence the husband will desert the wife, every family is invaded by death, orphanhood afflicts one, and widowhood another. Since, therefore, these scourges of God draw with them infinite miseries, it is not to be wondered at if the Prophets use war, pestilence, and famine, for shortness, when they signify that those who provoke God too long shall perish. Now follows a clearer explanation —

Ezekiel 6:12

12. He that is far off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall be consumed. **12.** Qui procul erit, peste morietur; et qui prope erit, gladio cadet, ¹⁴¹ et qui relictus fuerit, obsessus fame morietur: et complebo Indignationem ¹⁴² meam in ipsis.

¹⁴¹ “Some translate ‘shall fall on the sword,’ but too harshly. Already, in the last verse, the Prophet used the same word in a different sense, therefore I change nothing: he who is near shall fall by the sword.” — Calvin.

¹⁴² Or, “burning” — Calvin.

die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them.

Now the Prophet explains himself how the Israelites were to be destroyed by famine, the sword, and pestilence, namely, *those who shall be far off shall die by pestilence*; that is, after they think themselves hidden in secret places, so that no danger nor inconvenience can overtake them, they shall die there by pestilence. For when they were dragged into distant exile, they thought themselves altogether remote from all harm. But pestilence, he says, shall attack them although the sword shall cease. Then those who shall be at hand, that is, those who remain at home, the sword shall consume. Now the remnant, he says, who had been besieged and hemmed in, shall die by famine. And so he confirms what we formerly saw, that there should be no cause why the Israelites should sleep amidst their sins when God spared them: because if they do not all perish by the sword, God has other means of punishing them; for he has pestilence and famine in his hand, so that he can extinguish those who are far off, since pestilence will pursue them even there; then if any are left, they shall perish — even in the midst of peace — nevertheless, because God will destroy them by famine and want. Then he adds, *I will fulfill my burning wrath against them*: by which words God signifies that he had borne with that impious people thus far, but if at any time he pleased to exercise rigor, that he had not yet exacted sufficient punishment for their wickedness. Hence God blames them, though he had borne with them thus far, and although he had sometimes stricken them with his rods, yet he was not a rigid judge, but admonishes them as a father to return to the right way. But since they had so obstinately abused God's forbearance, he here pronounces that his last act was approaching, and for this reason he speaks of *the fulfilling of his burning anger*: thus the Prophet turns away all envy from God, that the Israelites should not charge him with cruelty; thus he shows them that whatever evils they suffered were only a prelude to a horrible slaughter which was overhanging them, and which they still despised. It follows —

Ezekiel 6:13

13. Then shall ye know that I *am* the LORD, **13.** Et cognoscetis quod ego Iehovah, cure when their slain *men* shall be among their idols vulnerati eorum ¹⁴³ in medio idolorum ipsorum round about their altars, upon every high hill, in ¹⁴⁴ in circuitu altarium ipsorum, super omnem all the tops of the mountains, and under every collem excelsum, in omnibus capitibus ¹⁴⁵ green tree, and under every thick oak, the place montium, et sub omni arbore frondosa, et sub where they did offer sweet savour to all their omni quercu densa, ¹⁴⁶ in loco ubi obtulerint idols. suffitum bonae fragrantiae omnibus idolis suis.

¹⁴³ Or, "slain." — Calvin.

¹⁴⁴ "The person is here changed, but this does not obscure the sense." — Calvin.

¹⁴⁵ That is, "the tops" — Calvin.

¹⁴⁶ "Some translate 'elm,' but it is also oak." — Calvin.

Now he again announces that they shall know what they have long neglected. But here a different knowledge from the former seems to be marked; for he has lately said that they should so remember as to be ashamed, and acknowledge that the slaughters predicted by the Prophets had not been in vain: but here he mentions nothing of this kind, but only speaks of that experimental knowledge which is common to the ungodly. And, in truth, this doctrine seems to be extended promiscuously to all the commonalty. For although for the most part they did not profit by it, yet all perceived that God was a judge, because so clear and conspicuous was the proof of his vengeance, that they were compelled to feel, whether they would or not, that their punishment was just. We may perceive, then, that the Prophet intends the phrase — *then ye shall know, etc.*, in a wide sense, because he addresses all the Israelites without exception, even those who should perish. For, we said, such was the character of that knowledge, that it only frightened them, and did not bend them to humility. And, truly, the words which follow show only the terrible vengeance of God, *when they shall be slain*, says he, that is, shall fall, *near their idols*. But we have said that they would more clearly acknowledge the vengeance of God from this — that he rendered their false gods an object of ridicule. But, as I have said before, the Prophet uses an opprobrious name when speaking of idols. Since, therefore, they so fell near their idols, under the confidence and protection of which they thought that they would always be safe; and although the idols themselves were thus involved in the condemnation, this made God's vengeance more manifest. And this is the reason, as I have before suggested, why the Prophet enters into these details. What follows is to the same purpose — by *the circuit of all their altars*. This, then, was profanation of all altars, to be defiled by carcases being drawn over them, and then sprinkled with human blood. But he also points out the places where they worshipped false gods; for we have said that lofty places were chosen for them, but here he puts *lofty hills*, and then *the tops of the mountains*. But as idol-worshippers heaped to themselves various and numerous games, when they were satiated with their high places, they had shady valleys, for their altars were under trees, where they offered incense. The Prophet therefore pronounces that there was no place which God did not condemn with infamy. When, therefore, he says that *the incense had a pleasing smell*, the opposite is doubtless intended, since this incense was foul before God: as when an immodest woman desires to please an adulterer, it moves the wrath of her husband, so here God silently complains that he was provoked by that foul incense with which the Israelites wished and desired to gratify their idols.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou not only proposest to us this day the ancient examples of thine anger, by which we may be restrained within thy pure and perfect worship, but also hast so clearly manifested thyself to us, through thine only-begotten Son, that we cannot err unless we are insane, — grant, I say, that we may be not only docile and moral, but attentive to that doctrine which is contained in thy gospel, so that we may be directed by this perfect light, until we arrive at length at the full and solid alliance with the Sun of righteousness, Christ, thy Son. — Amen.

LECTURE EIGHTEENTH

Ezekiel 6:14

14. So will I stretch out my hand upon them, **14.** Et extendam manum meam super eos, et and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate ponam terram vastitatem, et derelictionem ¹⁴⁷ prae than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their deserto Diblathah in omnibus habitationibus habitations: and they shall know that I *am* the eorum: et cognoscent quod ego Iehovah. LORD.

Ezekiel pursues the same sentiment, but it is necessary to persist with more words in confirmation of his prophecy, because it was somewhat difficult of belief, especially among men so secure, and who had been hardened against God by long habit. This is the reason, then, why he uses so many words about a thing in itself by no means obscure. Now he speaks concerning *the extension of God's hand*, which is a Scriptural form of speech sufficiently familiar; for it is said that God extends his hand when he puts forth manifest examples of his wrath. But the phrase is taken from men, who, if they wish to accomplish anything great extend their arm. We know that God accomplishes all things by his nod alone, but because through our sluggishness we do not comprehend his judgment, the Scripture, in compassion to our rudeness represents his hand as extended. But he says, *that he will place the land in devastation and stupor*. The two words, , *shemmeh*, and , *shemeh*, are different, though derived from the same root. , *shemeh*, signifies to destroy and lay waste; also to wonder at: so that the explanation of some is not bad — I will place the land for a desolation and an astonishment. But because the comparison of a desert follows immediately, I willingly subscribe to the opinion of those who translate desolation or solitude, and vacancy or waste: for although these two words are synonymous, as they say, yet the Prophet properly adds vacancy or solitude to waste, because he does not. inculcate the same thing too often, for the sake of explanation, but only that he may confirm what he otherwise knew would not be attended to by the Israelites. Some translate from the desert even to Diblathah; and there are some who think Riblatha should be read instead of Diblathah — and it may happen that an error has crept in, on account of the similarity of the letters and . But I do not think any change is needed: and besides, I reject as absurd, the explanation from the desert even to Diblathah or Riblatha. But is rather a mark of comparison: *the land of Israel shall be reduced to desolation* more than the desert of Diblathah. For how could the Prophet have said — from the desert even to Diblathah? The threat is against the land of Israel, but Diblathah was in Syria beyond the land, for they think it was Antioch: hence the true sense, according to the Prophet's intention, could not be elicited from this. But it is most suitable that the desert should be placed before the eyes of the Israelites, because it was not far from their country: Syria was between them and it, but since there was frequent intercourse, that desert was sufficiently known to them. Already had they passed through the desert when they passed into exile, and the difference in the aspect of the country would rather waken up their senses: for the whole of Syria is fertile, and Antioch has an excellent site, as geographers relate. Since, therefore, the Israelites had traversed a pleasant land, and one filled with all opulence, when they came to a desert vast and sorrowful, that appearance, as I have said, would stir them up

¹⁴⁷ “Or, stupor: for , *shemeh*, as we have seen, signifies this also.” — Calvin

the more. This, therefore, appears to me the reason why the Prophet says that the desert Diblathah was not so waste, or solitary, or dry, or squalid, as the land of Israel should become.

He says, *in all their habitations*, that they may know that there would be no corner free from that devastation which he predicts: for it will often happen that some land is partially seized and spoiled, but here the Prophet comprehends all habitations. *And they shall know*, he says, *that I am Jehovah*: that is, they shall know that I have spoken by my Prophets. But God announces this with displeasure, because the Prophet's authority ought to have been sacred and established among the people. For his calling was so marked out that they could not contend against him without being opposed to God. Hence Ezekiel is omitted here, and God comes forward, as if he had spoken himself. *They shall know*, therefore, he says, both my faithfulness and power. Besides this knowledge is extended to the reprobate who do not profit by God's chastisements. Although, therefore, experience compels them to acknowledge God as a judge, yet they remain obstinate, as we shall soon see again and again. It follows —

CHAPTER 7

Ezekiel 7:1-2

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| <p>1. Moreover, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,</p> <p>2. Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land.</p> | <p>1. Et fuit sermo Iehovæ ad me, dicendo,</p> <p>2. Et tu fili hominis, sic dicit Dominator Iehovah terræ Israel, vel de terra; finis, venit finis super quatuor alas terræ.</p> |
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Ezekiel seems here too verbose; for he repeats the same sentiments almost in the same words. But the reason which I have brought forward must be marked, if God had only uttered his commands shortly, when the people were not only slow to believe but of a perverse disposition, his message had proved cold and ineffectual. With this design he uses, as we have seen, many words, and now repeats the same: he now changes his expression, because he ought by all means to stimulate that sloth, or rather sluggishness, under which the people labored. Another thing to be noted is, that he came not once only by God's command to preach to the people, but. that he was often sent to stir up their minds. For if he had included in one context what God had enjoined, the Israelites might for the time have thought of God's judgment, but a prophecy once uttered would have easily escaped them. Besides, when Ezekiel testifies that he was sent by God, and afterwards returns and affirms that he brings new commands, this was more effectual to influence their minds. Now we see the meaning of the phrase, *the word was given by Jehovah* For this prophecy is distinguished from the former, and yet the matter is the same, without any difference, as it seems to weave in with the same discourse: this, indeed, is true, but he ought to be sent twice, that the people may understand that not once only, but twice and perpetually, what he heard from God's mouth was to be repeated: since it was sufficiently clear, that God was anxious for their safety, since he never ceased to exhort them. *Thus, therefore, says the Lord Jehovah concerning the land of Israel: an end is coming, an end upon the four corners of the land* Here God seems to regard the moderate punishments which he had already inflicted on the kingdom of Israel. For we know that they often felt God's hand, but when some relaxation was afforded them, they thought themselves escaped, so they forgot their wickedness and went on in it so carelessly that it was very clear that they despised God, unless when he oppressed them with his dreadful power. This seems the meaning of the word *end*, and it is emphatically repeated: *an end is coming, an end upon the four corners of the land* He puts, indeed, wings, but intends it metaphorically for four different regions. God, therefore, reproves the Israelites for their obstinacy, because though often chastised they did not cease to transgress, through not supposing that any thing more grievous could happen. He puts therefore the word *end*, as if he said, hitherto I have treated you moderately. And surely God had displayed a remarkable specimen of clemency in punishing the Israelites so lightly when he might utterly have cut them off. Since, therefore, he had so refrained himself in punishing, the sluggishness of the people was on that account the less tolerable, since they thought all was over as soon as God had withdrawn his hand. *An end*, says he, *an end is come*, that is, after this you must not hope for any moderation. I see there is no hope of repentance in you, and so I shall utterly consume you; and he adds, *on the four corners*

of the land, as he had just said, in all your dwellings. Again, therefore, he teaches, that no part of the earth should be free from the slaughter which he predicts. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:3

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| <p>3. Now <i>is</i> the end <i>come</i> upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations.</p> | <p>3. Nune finis super to: et mittam indignationem meam in to, et judicabo secundum vias tuas: et ponam super to cunctas abominationes tuas.</p> |
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He puts the word *end* a third time, and repeats it even a fourth and a fifth time. Whence we collect, that those miserable ones, although admonished more than enough both by teaching and experience, were yet like brute animals, so that they always promised themselves something to fly to, and were not impressed with the fear with which the Prophet would strike them. They did not think that an end was really coming, but said, Oh! something will remain, some will escape; and this therefore was their pride. Hence the Prophet does not inculcate the same word in vain: *now*, says he, *the end is come* When he says *the end has come*, he signifies that the Israelites vainly and foolishly trusted in the future, because they had not yet experienced extreme rigor. God, as he had said, had been lenient with them as to punishment. What then did they do? When they perceived such forbearance in God they thought, that it would always be so. Hence the Prophet marks the difference between the past and future, as if he should say, that God's vengeance as they had formerly known it, was moderate, but now nothing else remained but that God should utterly tear them up and consume them. *Now*, therefore, *there is an end concerning thee* He had spoken in the third person, but he was directing his discourse to the whole land of Israel, and he had said upon the four corners of the land, *now*, says he, *the end cometh upon thee* Then, *I will send my indignation upon thee* God indeed had given signs of his anger, but he had not been so severe that the Israelites ceased from flattering themselves. When, therefore, he speaks of his own indignation, he doubtless signifies that he was so offended that he would not restrain himself as he had formerly done. This too is the sense of what follows, *I will judge thee according to thy ways*. They had been judged formerly, but only in part; for God had given them time for repentance had they been curable: but now, when he compares their judgment with their sins, he means, that nothing was wanting to extreme severity. And he explains that more clearly at the end of the verse, *I will put upon thee all thine abominations*, that is, I will cast thine own burden upon thee. For although God had begun to exact just punishment. for their superstitions, yet they had not suffered a greater burden than they deserved. Hence God now pronounces *that all their abominations should come upon their own heads*, so that they should be utterly buried. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:4

4. And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways miserebor: quia vias tuas super te ponam, et upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the abominations tuae in medio tui erunt: et midst of thee: and ye shall know that I *am* the cognoscetis quod ego Iehovah. LORD.

In other words he confines his own sentence, that *God will not spare them*, nor will he be entreated. For when hypocrites hear the praises of God which are assigned to him in scripture, namely, that he is merciful and long-suffering, (Numbers 14:18; Psalm 103:8,) they seize upon them and fabricate for themselves the material of foolish and perverse confidence. God here pronounces that his pity would not be accessible to the wicked, who do not cease to repel it far from them. And this is worthy of notice, because nothing is more natural than to be intoxicated with false hope when we hear that God is merciful, unless we know for what purpose he testifies this concerning himself, namely, that sinners may betake themselves to him, and may fearlessly call upon him, and implore his mercy, of which they have such remarkable testimony. But hypocrites always become worse, meanwhile they wish God to be propitious to them. Hence when he says, *his eye will not spare, neither would he pity them*, his intention must be observed, that wicked and ungodly men should not think his clemency prepared for them against which they have previously shut the door. *Because I will put thy ways upon thee* — that is, I will cast thy wickedness against thee. We see then that the people's sins were placed before them, and as it were lay there as long as God spared them. Now, therefore, he first signifies that they should have no cause of quarrel or complaint, because he will cast against them the iniquities which they had heaped upon him. Then also he silently accuses them of too much security, because they never could be brought to repentance, while God sustained and tolerated their sins. *And thy abominations*, he says, *shall be in the midst of thee* They were so from the first as far as their guilt was concerned, but God had not yet poured forth his anger. He says, therefore, *thy abominations shall be in the midst of thee*, because it should really appear that they were not obstinate against God without punishment. Again he repeats, *ye shall know that I am Jehovah* It is quite clear, that by their obstinacy they compelled God to speak thus, since they despised Ezekiel. But although they pretended to some piety, it cannot be doubted that they would despise God himself.

Therefore he reproves their impiety so sharply, because they denied that God was God as often as they withdrew their confidence from the teaching of the holy man. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:5

5. Thus saith the Lord GOD, An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. **5.** Sic dicit Dominator Iehovah: Malum, unum ¹⁴⁸ malum ecce veniet.

¹⁴⁸ Some understand , *acher*, and one evil more. — Calvin.

If we read , *acheth*, or , *acher*, the sense seems to me the same, *an evil, another evil is come*: that is, one evil is come from another, or one evil is come and an evil: that is, when one evil is come another will soon follow. Some explain it in way which seems to me harsh and unsatisfactory: one evil is come; this is so severe that at its first impulse it suffices for complete slaughter, so subtly do they explain it. But it seems to me that the sense of the Prophet flows best thus, *one evil shall come upon another* — that is, there will be no cessation in God’s heaping evils upon evils until the very name of the whole people shall become extinct. And this appears to me to be said, that the Israelites should not after their manner suppose themselves safe, if God gives them a short respite. For when a slight intermission happens, the impious erect their crests, and keep up their spirits, and think that God is at peace with them. Since, therefore, any intermission is taken by hypocrites, as if they had made their peace with God, therefore the Prophet says, *one evil shall come upon another* It follow —

Ezekiel 7:6

6. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. 6. Finis venit, venit finis: evigilavit super to, ecce venit.

The whole context has the same meaning, namely, that although the Israelites are deaf, yet they are compelled to attend to God’s continued threats. The Prophet therefore strikes their ears, because he was not immediately attended to, and again he speaks of the end: *an end is come*, says he, *an end is come* Here Ezekiel does not affect to use graceful figures of speech, but was rather compelled by necessity to use the repetitions which we see. For *the end* concerning which he speaks could with difficulty penetrate their minds, for they were always supposing that God could be appeased by various means. Since, therefore, they promised themselves something remaining behind, and put away from them what the Prophet taught about the end, he could not do otherwise than threaten often though he could scarcely persuade them. Hence *an end is come, an end is come: it has been watchful against thee: behold it is come* When he says *it has watched*, he signifies haste, not that God had suddenly revenged the wickedness of the ten tribes, but that he regards the torpor of those who indulged in a vain confidence and dream that God’s judgment is far distant. That diabolic proverb — “*Le terme vaut l’argent*,”¹⁴⁹ is still common in the mouths of many, and such impiety has been rife in all ages. When therefore God suspends his judgments, the reprobate intemperately boast themselves as if they could continue in sin with impunity. For this reason the Prophet says, *the end is watching* — that is, hastening — because although God had delayed he would no longer refrain from destroying the Israelites. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:7

¹⁴⁹ Meaning — the duration of the sinful pleasure is worth the price paid for it.

7. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the tempus, propinquus est dies tumultus, ¹⁵⁰ et non day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again clamor ¹⁵¹ montium. of the mountains.

Now he uses another word. He says, *the morning is come*, though some translate kingdom, but erroneously. For although *tzephireh*, is a turban sometimes, or a royal diadem, yet the Prophet's language is distorted when they say that the kingdom was transferred, or taken over to the Babylonians. But the sentence flows best — *the morning cometh*. By “the morning” he implies what he had said before, namely, the hastening of God's vengeance. As, therefore, he said the end was watching, since God was hastening to take vengeance, so also he says, *the morning is come to them*, and then rouses them from that drowsiness in which they had grown torpid. We know that hypocrites commit all their sins as if no eye were upon them; as long as God is silent and at rest they revel without shame or fear. But the chosen remain faithful even in secret; but God's word always shines before them, as Peter says — ye do well when ye attend to the Prophetic word, as a lamp shining in darkness. (2 Peter 1:19.) Although the faithful may be surrounded by darkness, yet they direct their eye to the light of celestial doctrine, so that they are watchful, and are not children of the night and of darkness, as Paul says. (1 Thessalonians 5:4,5.) But the impious are, as it were, immersed in darkness, and think they shall enjoy perpetual night. As the rising morning dispels the darkness of night, so also God's judgment, on its sudden appearance, strikes the reprobate with unexpected terror, but too late.

For this reason, then, the Prophet says, that *morning is come to the Israelites*, because they had promised themselves perpetual night, as if they were never to be called upon to render an account of their conduct. We see, therefore, that he alludes suitably to that torpor which was the cause of their obstinacy, when they thought themselves safe in their hiding-places. Hence he laughs at their perverse confidence, who promise themselves impunity because they are in night. For the *morning*, he says, will immediately seize upon you; hence *morning is coming upon thee, O inhabitant of the land*; afterwards, *the time is come*: *gneth*, properly signifies all appointed or determined time. Hence the Prophet meant that the time had come which God had fixed beforehand for his judgment, and thus he takes away from the impious the material for pride, for they always suppose that God is as it were asleep when he does not attack them at the very first moment. He speaks, therefore, of an appointed time, as in other places the Prophets usually do, and frequently of the year of visitation. He signifies the same thing when he says, *the day of tumult*, or noise, *is at hand*. This member of the sentence answers to the former. He had said the end was watching; he had said that the judgment was hastening on: now simply and without figure he says, the day is *at hand*, *krob*, a day, I say, *of noise, and not the echo of the mountains*, says he; that is, it shall not be an empty resounding, as when a sound is produced among the mountains a concussion arises, and since the sounds which are uttered there, when taken up by the neighboring mountains, return to their own place, and thus a greater resounding occurs, called echo. The Prophet therefore says, that the clamor of which he speaks should not be an echo, that is, an empty resounding, because all

¹⁵⁰ Or sound; some translate “of cutting off,” I know not why — Calvin.

¹⁵¹ Some translate “glory,” as if it had been *hed*. — Calvin.

should seriously cry out. Some think *hed*, means “acclamations,” which is properly *hided*; it is, indeed, from the same root, but *her*, is used in the same sense. But if this explanation seems better, the Prophet will allude to mountains, not lofty, but vine-bearing, as many were in the land of Israel. But the other explanation is preferable, namely, *there shall be the sound of a tumult*, not on account of the reverberation, as they say, but because every one should cry out, until sorrow and crying should abound on every side. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:8

8. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. **8.** Nunc e propinquo effundam indignationem super te, et complebo iram meam in te, et iudicabo te secundum vias tuas: et ponam super te cunctas abominationes tuas.

He repeats here almost the same words. We have explained the intention, namely, that the Israelites should be positively assured that God threatened not for the sake of frightening them, but because the execution of his wrath was prepared. *Now*, says he, *I will shortly pour out my indignation*. He had said the day was at hand. This refers to the time; for it would be foolish to place together *I will shortly pour out my indignation, against thee*, and *I will fulfill my indignation against thee*; this *fulfilling* explains what he had formerly said concerning the end. For God had formerly executed his vengeance against the Israelites, but not completely. This completion, then, of God’s wrath prevails even as far as their ultimate destruction. Now I have explained those words — *I will judge thee according to thy ways, and I will put upon thee all thine abominations*

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, that we being admonished by such remarkable proofs of thy wrath, may learn to walk anxiously in thy sight, and so to bring ourselves into voluntary obedience to thyself, that the certain testimony to our gratuitous adoption may appear in our life; and grant that we may so prove ourselves to be sons, that we may truly invoke thee the Father, until we arrive at that blessed inheritance which has been obtained for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son. — Amen.

LECTURE NINETEENTH.

Ezekiel 7:9

9. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to miserebor: secundum vias tuas super te ponam, thy ways and thine abominations *that* are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD that smiteth. **9.** Et oculus meus non parcet, neque I have pity: I will recompense thee according to miserebor: secundum vias tuas super te ponam, thy ways and thine abominations *that* are in the et abominationes tuae in medio tui erunt: et midst of thee; and ye shall know that I *am* the cognoscetis quod ego Iehovah percutiens. LORD that smiteth.

This verse contains nothing besides a repetition, unless that at last the Prophet more clearly points out what that knowledge was which he formerly mentioned, namely, that they should unwillingly feel God's power, because they had withdrawn their confidence from the Prophet's teaching. For he had said two or three times, *ye shall know that I am Jehovah*: now he adds the participle, *and that it is I who smite you*. This then is the knowledge by which God makes himself known to the reprobate, while they are compelled, whether they will or not, to feel that there is a judge of the world. The faithful indeed profit under God's chastisements, and they are at times humbled under his hand, because they do not willingly obey his word: but we said that the Prophet here triumphs over the people's pride who dared to deride all threats as if God were sleeping in heaven. He says therefore at length, that when God strikes them they should feel what they did not believe. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:10

10. Behold the day, behold, it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, mane, floruit baculus, germinavit superbia. **10.** Ecce dies ecce venit: egressum est ¹⁵² pride hath budded.

Now Ezekiel uses another figure, but to the same purpose. He repeats what he had said before: *the day is come*, and he adds another part, that *the morning had advanced*. But we said that the impious, when God connives at their sins, exult as it were in darkness without shame or fear. Since therefore they were as wanton as if they had obtained the license of night, the Prophet denounces that morning is at hand, because God would suddenly bring to light what they thought would be always hidden. Since therefore, when God retired, they supposed themselves in complete darkness, the Prophet recalls them to the consideration of the daily order of things: for light emerges immediately from the dawn. Thus he laughs at their folly, because they thought that God had his eyes shut, when for the time he dissembles. This therefore is the reason, as was fully explained yesterday, why the Prophet calls the sudden change *morning*. Therefore *the morning has arisen*, afterwards, *the rod has blossomed, pride has flourished*. It is not doubtful that he means Nebuchadnezzar by the rod, but interpreters vary on the context; for many refer the following verse to the king of Babylon: but others, in my judgment rightly, take it of the Israelites themselves. As to his saying *the rod has blossomed*, it refers to God's forbearance. For when the Israelites had sinned a long while with impunity, they thought, as I said yesterday, that their peace with God

¹⁵² Or, "has arisen" — Calvin.

would be perpetual. But here Ezekiel pronounces in opposition to this, that God had as it were a hidden root; as he who plants a tree waits for the time, till it rises to a just magnitude. Hence he compares Nebuchadnezzar to a rod which was growing. God could indeed without man's assistance destroy the Israelites, and could also compel others to obey him: for all creatures are at hand to fulfill his commands; but here Ezekiel commends God's forbearance, though he had planted the tree, from which the rod was to spring up with which he would smite the Israelites. So he reproves their sloth, because they did not reflect upon the time of their visitation, which God had determined in his secret counsel.

On the whole, in saying *the rod has flourished*, he refers to those steps which God takes in executing his judgments. For he does not act hastily after the manner of men, but just as a husbandman in sowing and planting. Hence God provides for his own use ministers of vengeance, and permits them to increase and to arrive at maturity. If therefore God does not hasten as we wish, we may know that he still has rods prepared, and if they are not yet grown to maturity, it is because the time which the Almighty has previously fixed is not yet arrived. Now it follows, *that pride has budded* I have just said that some referred this to the Babylonians, but I rather understand it of the Israelites. Hence God shows how the staff grew in Chaldea by which the Israelites were to be struck, and yet the root was among themselves. For here the noun "pride" is to be taken as usual in a bad sense: it does not denote simply haughtiness or arrogance, but that licentiousness which springs from a contempt of God. But this does not suit the Babylonians as far as God governed them with his hand, when he wished to take vengeance on the Israelites. But in this sense there is nothing forced, *that the staff with which the Israelites were to be struck had increased*, and yet it had no other origin than their sins, and hence that no other root need be sought for than this. Hence *it flourished*, but whence did it spring? from pride *The seed therefore of this staff* was the pride of the Israelites. But this pride is akin to impiety, and we know that they were blinded by their confidence when they despised God, and treated all his threats as vain. Hence the Prophet points out pride as the fountain of all evils. A clearer explanation follows —

Ezekiel 7:11

11. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them *shall remain*, nor of non ex ipsis, et non ex opulentia ipsorum, et non their multitude, nor of any of theirs: neither *shall* ex strepitu ipsorum, et non luctus inter ipsos. *there be* wailing for them.

This is an explanation of the words, *that pride had budded*: now he adds violence to pride, which is its fruit: for contempt of God always begets cruelty and savagery, and rapine, and all injustice. But he speaks, as I have said, concerning the Israelites. He says *that violence had risen up into a rod of wickedness* Thus he confirms what he had touched upon, that the rod of God's vengeance was not to be sought elsewhere than among the Israelites. God indeed had stirred up the king of Babylon to punish them: but the rod had grown up from the root of their wickedness by which the Israelites had provoked God's anger: and so he adds, *that nothing should be left of them: nothing, says he, should remain safe, either of themselves or of their opulence*: for so I interpret

, *hemon*: then, of their noise or multitude; either will do moderately well; *and there shall not be wailing for them* Jerome reads, , *neh*, and hence translates — there shall not be rest among them: but the Prophet means that there shall be neither sorrow nor lament, because the slaughter of all would be promiscuous. And we saw the same in Jeremiah: when one family has perished, friends and acquaintances assemble, and celebrate the funeral of the deceased; but when a pestilence pervades the whole city, and no house is free from death: nay when fathers are mingled with sons, so that their carcases can scarcely be drawn out for multitude, all sorrow ceases. With this intention then the Prophet says, *there shall be no grief* nor lamentation. For , *neheh*, means lamentation. But we have already explained its meaning, namely, that all the Israelites were so destined to destruction that there should be, no survivors to lament the dead, and even should there be any, they should be so astonished amidst the multitude of the dead, that every duty of humanity towards them would perish. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 7:12

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| <p>12. The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath <i>is</i> upon all the multitude thereof.</p> | <p>12. Venit tempus statutum, appropinquavit dies, quo emens non lætabitur, et qui vendit non afficietur tristitia; quia indignatio super omnem multitudinem ejus.</p> |
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The Prophet now uses another kind of speech. Meanwhile he teaches that there should be such a change that all things should be so mixed as if there were no difference between the rich and the poor. Yet such a change does not happen unless God were grievously offended, and so did not exact ordinary vengeance as he had formerly denounced. Paul indeed exhorts all the pious to pass through this world as if they were pilgrims in it, (1 Corinthians 7:29, 30, 31,) and thus he says is our faith proved, as with the buyer so with the seller, as with the married so with the single. This general doctrine is prescribed to all the children of God, since the fashion of this world passes away, that they may pass through it, without having their minds fixed on these perishing things. But the meaning of our Prophet is different, because God will so disturb all things among the Israelites, that there shall be no difference between buyer and seller. He who acquires rejoices, and he who is compelled to sell suffers some degree of sorrow; and sometimes the man who is deprived of his lands and possessions tears out as it were his own entrails. It is natural therefore for the buyer to rejoice, and for the seller to lament. Now God shows that the confusion in the kingdom of Israel was so great, that neither poverty nor riches afford the material for sorrow or grief. Now we understand the Prophet's meaning. He says, *the time has come, the day has approached, in which the buyer will not rejoice, and the seller will not lament: because, says he, indignation is upon all this multitude* Here that reason of Paul is not brought forward, that the fashion of this world passes away, but a concussion, or rather ruin of that land is pointed out, so that nothing remains safe. For although, whilst we travel through the world, we ought always to erect our minds and senses towards heaven, yet the political faculty remains and flourishes even among the faithful. For the sons of God, though they are poor in spirit, yet possess what God has conferred upon them: they exist, as Paul exhorts them, as it were not possessing but yet enjoying their goods. But the Prophet here

signifies, that when the kingdom of Israel shall have been overturned, there will be no use for either money or lands, because all being cast out of their country shall be reduced to want. And he follows up the same sentiment —

Ezekiel 7:13

13. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for revertetur: et adhuc inter vivos vita ipsorum: ¹⁵³ non the vision *is* touching the whole multitude quia visio super omnem multitudinem ejus: non thereof, *which* shall not return; neither shall any revertetur, et vir in sua iniquitate animam suam strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life. non roborabit. ¹⁵⁵

This verse is interpreted variously, but the Prophet's meaning is by no means obscure: at the beginning he says, that those who sold had no cause of sorrow on account of their not returning to their lands. But this does not seem suitable. But, under one member, the Prophet comprehends what I have lately said — that the disturbance of all things would be so great, that the lands would be deprived of their masters, and those who formerly possessed them would be outcasts and exiles; they would be in want of all things, and be unable to plant their foot on their own soil. Nor is this opinion contrary to Jeremiah's prophecy. (Jeremiah 32:7, 8, 9.) When Jeremiah was in prison, he was commanded to buy land from a relation: but that was done that the faithful might hope for their promised restitution with quiet minds. But the discourse is now directed to the reprobate, who were excluded from all hope of freedom. Our Prophet, therefore, only fulminates here in God's name, and breathes nothing but terrors; there is no mention of favor in the meantime, because they had cast themselves into despair. And this is the reason why he speaks of perpetual slaughter. He says, therefore, *they shall not return to the things sold, although their life is among the living* This clause is variously explained, but I do not willingly consume time in repeating the errors of others: I shall follow what appears to me to be right. First, this clause must be read adversatively: he says, indeed, *and as yet their life is among the living*: but the copula ought thus to be resolved — although their life is among the living. The Prophet seems to allude to a custom then common. For there was not a sale of lands in perpetuity among the sons of Abraham; for that was forbidden by the law, because they were only strangers in the land. (Leviticus 25:13, 14, 15.) God, therefore, in claiming the dominion of the land, did not permit them to sell their land except for a time — for every fiftieth year they returned to their own possessions. If they sold in the twentieth year, they were restored after thirty years; if in the fortieth, the sale was only for ten years, through the occurrence of the Jubilee. Now therefore the Prophet says, *although they remain survivors, yet they shall not return* Why? for the captivity will hinder them. Now, therefore, we understand the Prophet's meaning: *those who sold*, says he, *shall suffer no loss* For if they had remained at home, they would have been deprived of their possessions; but this shall not happen, for they shall be dragged to a distant

¹⁵³ Or, "to the thing sold." — Calvin.

¹⁵⁴ That is, "although they are yet alive." — Calvin.

¹⁵⁵ Or, "shall not strengthen his life." — Calvin.

region, and there they shall live and die exiles. But if they should protract their life even to the hundredth year, yet their possession will remain deserted, because the conquerors will not allow them to return to their country. Hence the miserable condition of the exiles is denoted, since, if God were to prolong their life, they would still be compelled to consume it in poverty and want, since they had been driven away from their lands and were unable to return to them.

He adds, *because the vision shall not return upon all the multitude of them* Here also interpreters differ. For some distinguish this part into two clauses, because the vision was for the whole people, nor had any one been converted or repented. This opinion is plausible, because it contains a useful and fruitful doctrine, which is everywhere met with among the Prophets. For we know that nothing is less tolerable to God, than when men, admonished by Prophets, do not return to a sound mind, but go on in their wickedness. Since, therefore, such obstinacy exceedingly provokes God's anger, this sense seems to suit well enough — that the vision was for the whole multitude, and yet none repented; that is, that God exhorted all, from the least to the greatest, to repentance; for all were deaf, and, as it were, desperate in their vices. Although, therefore, this exposition seems probable, I do not adopt it: for I doubt not the Prophet's meaning to be that *the vision concerning the whole multitude should not return*; that is, be in vain. And thus also Isaiah speaks when he says, thy word shall not return to me void, (Isaiah 55:11,) for he means that prophecies are always joined with their effects. Some turn this to the fruit of the doctrine, because God will always have some disciples who will embrace the prophetic word. But this is foreign to the purpose. The Prophet rather means that hypocrites will be greatly deceived, while they think God's word to be an empty sound, by which the air only is struck. Hence he says that God's word will not want its effect., because God will fulfill whatever he pronounces — whether he promise safety to the faithful, or denounce destruction on the reprobate. As therefore Isaiah says God's word shall not return to him fruitless, since he will prosper it, so our Prophet denies that God's word should return after it had been promulgated against the whole multitude. *The vision*, therefore, is taken here for the prophetic doctrine; but there is no doubt that he restricts the vision to God's judgment. *The vision*, therefore, *was towards the whole multitude, nor shall it return*; that is, it shall be certainly executed. Afterwards he adds, *and a man shall not strengthen his soul in his iniquity* Others term it — in the iniquity of his soul: but since the relative is double, this opinion cannot stand; but others take it otherwise. But I am unwilling to hold you in suspense here, and it seems to me that nothing is more useful than to investigate the genuine sense of the Prophet. I have no doubt the Prophet here confirms what we have now explained — that it is vain for the despisers of God to hope to escape, because when God executes his vengeance, he will hold them in his grasp. For as to what others say, that they have not fortified their soul on account of iniquity; that is, that they were so bound down to their sinfulness, that they did not lift up their minds and desires to the hope of safety, that sense is too forced. Therefore the Prophet confirms what we now see, namely, that his threats should not return empty, because God would take away all material for confidence from the hypocrites and despisers of his teaching. For the impious wrestle against God, and oppose their own obstinacy and hardness, as if by violence they could break and destroy his word. Since, therefore, the wicked precipitate themselves so boldly, says the Prophet, *they shall not fortify themselves by iniquity unto life*; that is, they shall strive in vain to obtain life by their iniquity, which is not sufficient for resistance. I do not understand — on account of their iniquity; because he simply denounces that obstinacy should be in vain, which profane men use as a shield against God, and its force be reduced to nothing. They shall not fortify themselves, therefore, *in life*, or by iniquity, *unto life*; that is, by that

obstinate wickedness by which they think themselves superior. Let us, therefore, from this place learn to tremble at God's threats, and always to have their effect before our eyes, as the Apostle says — Noah saw by faith the deluge which was hidden, (Hebrews 11:7,) because, whilst others indulged themselves, he was always reflecting during one hundred and twenty years how horrible that vengeance would be. So, therefore, when God has spoken, may we immediately apprehend his judgment, as if it were clear before our eyes; and let us especially beware of that obstinacy which will assuredly be in vain, because we hear what the Prophet here denounces. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:14

14. They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready; but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath *is* upon all the multitude thereof. **14.** Claxerunt tuba, pararunt omnia; ¹⁵⁶ nemo autem egressus ad proelium: quia indignatio mea super totam multitudinem ejus.

Here the Prophet adds, although the Israelites provide themselves with every aid, and prepare all things for carrying on the war, nay, while they omit nothing for the best fortification, yet when it came to the point, their hopes would be vain, and all the supplies which they prepared for themselves of no avail. *However, therefore, they may blow the trumpet, and prepare all things*, he says, *yet no one goes out to battle* The reason must be marked, *since God's indignation was upon the whole multitude of them*, that is, because God determined to destroy them all. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 7:15

15. The sword *is* without, and the pestilence and the famine within: he that *is* in the field shall die with the sword; and he that *is* in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. **15.** Gladius foris, pestis et fames e domo: qui in agro erit, gladio morietur: qui autem in urbe, eum fames et pestis consumet.

He inculcates what we have seen before, although this sentence agrees with the last verse. He had said that God's anger should be on all the people; now he shows that none were safe when God stretched forth his hand for avenging their sins. Now he says, *he had in his hand a sword, and pestilence, and famine. If they went out into the field, says he, a sword shall meet them; if they remain at home in the city, pestilence and famine shall consume them there*; as if he said, God could fetch various kinds of destruction from different quarters, because he will arm foreign enemies, who shall devastate the whole land; and if these enemies were at rest, yet there were others, *famine and pestilence* Here he signifies, that although the Israelites closed their houses, and desired and

¹⁵⁶ Or, "Blow ye the trumpet, and make ready, as others translate, in the imperative mood, but I prefer the perfect tense — they have blown and prepared all things." — Calvin.

endeavored to expel every thing injurious, yet God's wrath could penetrate all hiding-places. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:16

16. But they that escape of them shall escape, **16.** Et evadent evasores ipsorum, ¹⁵⁷ et erunt and shall be on the mountains like doves of the super montes quasi columbae vallium, omnes valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his fremendo, ¹⁵⁸ vir ¹⁵⁹ in sua iniquitate. iniquity.

The Prophet seems here to be at variance with himself, because he formerly pronounced them all devoted to destruction. How, then, does he now say that some should come hither and thither, to seek hiding-places in the mountains? But what seem at, variance easily agree, because by these words he means that the life of those who escaped should be more miserable than if they had perished by the sword, or had been consumed by pestilence and famine. And why so? *They shall be*, says he, *in the mountains*. By mountains he doubtless understands dry and desert places. But he who seeks hiding-places in the mountains is only anxious about preserving his life, since he expects not to live. So, therefore, the Prophet means, nothing can be more miserable than the exile of those who had escaped, because they would be in dry and desert places, *like doves of the valleys*, there they will not dare to cry out. He means, also, that they would be so timorous, that even in anxiety, want, and squalidness, and despair of all things, finally, in the heap of their miseries, they would groan *as doves*, and as *doves of the valleys*, that is, which hide themselves through fear, and dare not show themselves; unless, perhaps, the contrast increases the evil, as if he had said that they should be much more astonished, because the unaccustomed aspect of the place should strike them with greater fear. Now, therefore, we understand the Prophet's meaning — *if any should escape from the people*, yet nothing else would happen through their flight, than that they should miserably protract their life in the greatest anxiety. For we know that this is the last solace in evils, when men complain freely, and unburden themselves by weeping and groaning. But when the wretched one dares not complain, he becomes as it were twice dead among the living. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:17

17. All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak *as* water. **17.** Omnes manus solventur, et omnia genua ibunt aquae. ¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ That is, "those who are to escape of them shall escape." — Calvin.

¹⁵⁸ Or, "murmuring or shouting" — Calvin.

¹⁵⁹ That is, "each one" — Calvin.

¹⁶⁰ A mark of similitude must be understood — shall flow like water; for here 'to go' is taken for 'to flow.'

He confirms the last sentence, that such should be the trembling, that those who were oppressed with all kinds of evil, dare not utter their complaints freely. He says, *all hands should be loosened, and all knees should be unstable as water* We know that this doctrine frequently occurs with the Prophets, by which God shows that men's hearts were in his hands. But since profane men are fierce against God, through trusting in their own wealth or fortitude, hence, on the contrary, God pronounces that they should be timorous and anxious, nay, almost vanishing away, and as it were lifeless, as if their knees were flowing away amidst water, and their hands were relaxed. It follows

Ezekiel 7:18

18. They shall also gird *themselves* with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads. **18.** Et accingent se saccis, et operiet ipsos formido, et super omnes facies, ¹⁶¹ probum, ¹⁶² shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all et in omnibus capitibus calvitium.

He continues the same sentiment. He says, such was the slaughter of the people that they should all gird themselves with sackcloth. But it seems little in accordance with this, that those who should be astonished should gird themselves with sackcloth, so as not to bewail the dead. But the prophets so vary their discourse because they cannot otherwise affect obstinate minds. Although therefore these things do not seem at first sight to agree, *that they should bind themselves in sackcloth, and upon all their heads should be baldness*: then that all should perish without grief or sorrow: yet these things suit well enough, because the Prophet does not express what they should do, but what the event should be. Since, therefore, slaughter shall occur on every side, at length God shall consume some by pestilence, others by famine: therefore he adds, there should be material for grief, although in consequence of the multitude of evils they should be lifeless, and torpid, and omit all signs of sorrow. Therefore *they shall gird themselves with sackcloth* We know that this was a remarkable symbol of penitence, but it is often transferred to common sorrow, and even profane men clothe themselves in sackcloth, although they do not acknowledge God the author of evils. Hence when the Prophet says, *all should take sackcloth in which to clothe themselves*, he does not mean that they should feel punishments divinely inflicted that they should repent; but he only expresses the common ceremony of grief in distress which is also common to the wicked and to despisers of God, Now he adds, *fear shall cover them*, and *disgrace*, or shame, *shall be on all faces*: then *upon all heads shall be baldness* This was forbidden by the law, (Deuteronomy 14:1;) since we know that God restrained too much intemperance in sorrow, when he forbids the people to fall upon their face, or to make themselves bald; for that was preposterous affectation. And we know that men are ambitious in grief. Hence that God may impose restraint upon sorrow, he forbids his people to cut the skin, or to produce baldness. Hence we see that the Prophet does not speak of the true sign of repentance, but only marks, as I have said, that God's vengeance should be so horrible,

¹⁶¹ Or, "countenance." — Calvin.

¹⁶² Or, "shame." — Calvin.

that dread should cover them, and then that shame and confusion of face should come upon them: then, that they should cut the skin like the Gentiles, and put on sackcloth like men abandoned to destruction,

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast recalled us to thyself, that we may not grow torpid in our sins, nor yet become hardened by thy chastisements, but prevent in time thy final judgments, and so humble ourselves under thy powerful hand, that we may seriously testify and really prove our repentance, and so study to obey thee, that we may advance in newness of life more and more, until at length we put off all the defilements of the flesh, and arrive at the enjoyment of that eternal rest which thine only-begotten Son has acquired for us by his own blood, — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTIETH.

Ezekiel 7:19

19. They shall cast their silver in the streets, **19.** Et argentum suum per compita projicient, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and et aurum ipsorum in disjectionem ¹⁶³ erit: their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the argentum eorum et aurum eorum non poterit ad day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not liberandum ipsos in die excandescentiæ Iehovæ: satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: animam suam non satiaunt et viscera sua non because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity. replebunt, quia offendiculum iniquitatis ipsorum fuit.

Now the Prophet threatens that the desperation of the people would be so great that they would forget both gold and silver: for we know that men are more anxious about those possessions than about life itself. But gold, unless it be prepared for use, has no value in itself: yet we see that the majority are so inflamed with the desire of gold, that they cast themselves into the certain danger of death. For how many neglect their own life to acquire wealth: hence when men despise gold, they are assuredly astonished by fear and anxiety so as to lose their natural senses. The Prophet means this when he says, *they shall cast their gold into the streets*, because if they thought they should survive, and if there were any hope of life left, doubtless they would hide their gold and silver. But when gold is cast away, it is certain, as I have said, that all things are full of despair. *Their gold*, says he, *shall be cast away* I prefer this interpretation to an unclean thing. , *nede*, signifies pollution, defilement, and separation. If any prefer the translation “separation,” I do not object, only let us understand that the Jews would treat their gold as valueless, and so willingly

¹⁶³ Some translate, “as an unclean thing.” — Calvin.

separated from it. For we know that men are so attached to their gold and silver that it grieves them to be torn from what they so much love: no less than if you tore away their entrails. But the word “a casting away” is clearer, and will answer to the former member of the sentence better. He adds, *their gold and silver will be unable to preserve them in the day of Jehovah’s anger* Here the Prophet derides the perverse confidence of those who thought themselves safe, because fortified with great wealth. For when men see themselves protected by guards they fear nothing, and such security is not easily wrested from them. For this cause also, Ezekiel pronounces that gold and silver would be useless to the Jews when God was fierce against them. And at the same time he obliquely reproves their sloth, because they despised God’s judgments since they were spared at the time. Hence he declares — *the day of God’s burning wrath shall come*: then he says, *they shall not satisfy their souls*, and *they shall not fill their bellies* Here he means that the richest even should be famished. When any famine presses upon the people, yet those who have money at home do not suffer; besides, the rich have all kinds of produce in their barns and granaries. But the Prophet says, that the penury shall be such as to involve the rich, so that they should not have food to refresh themselves. Thus the reason is added, *because it was the stumblingblock of their iniquity* Some take this clause generally, that the Jews should stumble on account of their iniquity, that is, then shall be the time of receiving their reward. For God had seemed to pardon them, and not to notice so many iniquities with which they provoked him. He says therefore, *in that day shall be a stumblingblock*, if that sense pleases you, but I would rather restrict it to money itself, since silver and gold shall profit nothing, *inasmuch as it shall be a stumblingblock of iniquity*, that is, it shall be the material or occasion of sinning; and the next verse confirms this sense when it says —

Ezekiel 7:20

20. As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it in majesty: but they made the images of their abominations *and* of their detestable things therein: therefore have I set it far from them. **20.** Et decus ornamenti sui in superbiam posuit ipsum, et imagines abominationum *and* spurcitiarum suarum fecerunt ex illo: propterea posui illis ¹⁶⁴ in projectionem.

I doubt not that Ezekiel strengthens what he had just taught by other words, namely, that the people’s silver should be cast away, because it had been unworthily abused for luxury, vain pomps and superstitions. Some explain *tzebi-gnediu*, of the temple; and certainly I confess that the temple was the chief glory of the Jews, so that they might boast of it, if they had rightly and properly worshipped God there. Hence God conveyed great glory to the Jews when he desired a temple to be erected among them to himself, which should be as it were his earthly dwelling-place. But I do not see why we should take these words of the temple, because the Prophet explains his own discourse: for he mentions gold and silver: he said, there should be no use for gold and silver, because every one should cast it into the mud, since they should cast away all hope of life and safety. He now continues the same sentiment; he shows the lawful use of gold and silver: *it was*, says he, *the glory of his ornament* For whatever God has given to men is a testimony of his paternal

¹⁶⁴ Or, “I have appointed to them” — Calvin.

favor: therefore God's liberality is refulgent in us when he enriches us with his gifts. If therefore riches are a glory and ornament, so also are bodily health, and honors, and things of this kind. Since therefore God wishes his favor to be conspicuous in all his gifts, by which he adorns and marks men out, the Prophet properly says that the Jews were adorned with gold and silver. But he accuses them of ingratitude because they turned such glory to pride. For *gaon*, I here take in a bad sense, as in many other places: it sometimes signifies excellence, but I have no doubt that the Prophet here blames the Jews, because they were proud of their wealth, which they took as a testimony of God's favor. Therefore, says he, *he turned the beauty of their ornament, he turned it to pride* It follows, *and the images of their abominations and of their detestable things*, or of their idols, for the Hebrews thus speak sometimes of idols, *they made therewith* Here *gaon*, is used as if it were *gaon*, as often in other places, and thus it points out the material; for he says, that the Jews *made their images*, which were so many abominations before God, *out of gold and silver* This was a second profanation of God's gifts: the former was in pride, when the Jews through wantonness and abundance began to be insolent against God, thus they profaned the glory with which they had been adorned. But another pollution is also added, namely, that they made their idols of gold and silver, and offered to them gifts and sacrifices: as God complains in Hosea, (Hosea 2:8,) that they converted whatever he had conferred upon them into impious worship. I had given, said he, my corn, and wine, and oil: but they adorned their idols: this was forsooth their thanksgiving, that blind to my liberality, they offered sacrifices to their idols of my corn and oil and wine. Of which matter Ezekiel discourses more fully in Ezekiel 16. But he now says: *that they made images of their abominations out of that glory by which he had distinguished them* And at the end of the verse he confirms what we have lately seen: *wherefore*, says he, *I will appoint it*, namely, that beauty, *to them for a castaway* We see the same sentiment repeated which he had used before: but he here relates the reasons why the Jews should disregard their gold and silver in the day of God's wrath, since they had unworthily defiled these gifts of God in which his grace and paternal favor shone forth. *I will make*, therefore says he, *their gold or beauty as a castaway*: he had said the same thing before, but had not yet expressed the reason of God's wrath. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:21

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| <p>21. And I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall pollute it.</p> | <p>21. Et ponam ¹⁶⁵ ipsum in manum alienorum ad direptionem, et impiorum terrae ad spoliationem, et profanabunt ipsum.</p> |
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I have said that I do not approve of twisting these words to the sanctuary, as some interpreters do. Hence I do not doubt that the Prophet still speaks of the people. He changed indeed the number in the former verse, for at the beginning he had used the singular number: now he returns again to the singular number, and designates the people. *I will deliver it*, says he, *into the hand of strangers*. This was more severe than if they had been oppressed by any domestic tyranny: nor do I doubt that by strangers the Prophet signifies remote and barbarous nations, as we know that those with whom

¹⁶⁵ Or, "I will deliver." — Calvin.

we have no communication are more savage against us. First, therefore, he says, *they shall be the slaves of strangers*; he adds, *the impious of the earth*: he means that their enemies should be so cruel and wicked, that no pity or equity was to be expected from them. The sum is, that God's wrath would be terrible since he had borne the iniquities of the people so long. Hence we gather that wicked and abandoned men are God's scourges, and are governed by his will and hand. Since it is so, we gather that God so works by them that he is pure from all alliance with their faults, because he so exercises his judgments by means of them, that he appears without blame with regard to them; but they are condemned deservedly, because either their own avarice or ambition, or other lusts destroy them. *I shall give them therefore into the hands of strangers to destroy them: then, to the wicked of the earth for a prey, and they shall profane them* By this word interpreters have been induced to take this verse with reference to the sanctuary. But we know that *chelel*, is taken in another sense — to slay. This word therefore may be explained, that there shall be a general slaughter of the people: because the enemies not content with the booty and spoil, shall also slay the captives when they have obtained the victory. But I willingly retain the sense “profane,” which means the same as “render vile,” because the Prophet seems to me to allude to all kinds of abuse, as when we do not consider for what purpose things are intended, but rashly and thoughtlessly, contemptuously, and even insultingly dissipate them. It means therefore that such should be the insolence of their enemies, that they should waste and lay in ruins not only the people's substance, but also their persons: although this may be here referred to the substance itself: for a robber is said to prey upon a man when he takes away whatever he has and leaves him naked: in this sense we may conveniently explain what the Prophet now says. But that simple explanation satisfies me, namely, that the enemy shall so disperse the people generally, that there shall be no difference. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:22

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| <p>22. My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret <i>place</i>: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it.</p> | <p>22. Et avertam faciem meam ab ipsis, et profanabunt absconditum meum: et ingredientur in illud perruptores, ¹⁶⁶ et profanabunt illud.</p> |
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As to the beginning of the verse there is no ambiguity, for God pronounces that the Jews would be miserable, *because he would avert his face from them* For in this was situated their happiness, that God, as he had promised, would regard their safety. As long, therefore, as God deigned to look upon them, their safety was certain, so that there was no fear of danger. But when he no longer cared for them, these wretched ones were exposed to all calamities; hence they are said to be deprived of all protection, when alienated from God. This, then, is one clause. As to what follows, expositors interpret it of the sanctuary; and I do not greatly object to this, if any one approves of this sense, but I take it in a wider sense. For God in my view calls the land *his hidden place*, which was safe under his protection. For he says, that he had extended wings, under which he could hide the people, (Exodus 19:4;) and David prays that God would *receive* him within the hidden place of his tabernacle. (Psalm 27:5.) Since, therefore, the people was protected by the power of God,

¹⁶⁶ Or, “devastators.” — Calvin.

the land is deservedly called *God's hidden place*, as an asylum, and it will be proper so to translate it. *Devastators, therefore, shall profane my asylum, because they shall enter in there, and shall profane it.* He repeats the same word. Those who take it for the sanctuary restrict it to the holy of holies, for so they call the shrine or oracle whence the answers were given; and they call it an oracle, not from praying, but because they enquired there of secret things. But as I have said, that seems to be forced, though I will not quarrel with it, but show what I like better. The meaning is, however God had spared the Jews for a long time, nay, had them hidden, as it were, under his wings, and the land was as it were a sacred asylum, since they were so hidden that they felt no injury from foreign enemies: yet this should profit them nothing, because God would throw down all bulwarks, and give easy access to their enemies, so that they might break through, and then profane and confuse all things. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:23

23. Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence. **23.** Fac catenam: quia terra repleta est judicio sanguinum, et urbs repleta est violentia.

Interpreters refer the Prophet's being ordered to make a chain to the captivity; for we know that captives are accustomed to be bound with chains and fetters, or manacles. Hence they explain it that God threatens the people with exile. But the Spirit seems rather to allude to criminals, who plead their cause in chains. For the Jews had long reveled in their vices, and the absence of punishment had rendered them very audacious. Now the Prophet says, the time had come in which they were to be brought to the tribunal of God, and there to be dealt with most justly as criminals. Since, therefore, they bound criminals with chains, that they might plead their cause ignominiously — criminals, I say, who were already, as it were, half condemned; hence the Prophet is ordered *to make a chain*, so that not only the people should be called upon to render all account of their wickedness, but should also be drawn, whether they wished it or not, to God's judgment-seat. And he explains himself when he says, *since the land is full of the judgment of bloods* The Hebrews call *judgment of bloods* the material of death, when the cause is capital, and the criminal is so convicted that he cannot escape final punishment; so any capital conviction is called a judgment of blood. He says, therefore, *the earth is full of a judgment of bloods*, that is, is guilty of so many crimes, that it cannot escape the final vengeance. And afterwards he adds *the city*, which, in the general corruption of the land, ought to retain something of its purity; but he says, *the city also is so full of violence*, under which word are doubtless embraced all unjust oppressions — rapines, pillage, unlawful gains, robberies, and whatever opposes justice and equity. The result is, that the people's impiety and wickedness had come to such a pitch, that they were no longer endurable by God; and hence God ascends his tribunal to exact punishment from them; and this is the chain of which he speaks. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:24

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| <p>24. Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they shall possess their houses: I possidebunt domos eorum: et cessare faciam will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; superbiam fortium, et polluentur sanctuaria and their holy places shall be defiled.</p> | <p>24. Et venire faciam improbos gentium,¹⁶⁷ et</p> |
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He repeats what he had said, that enemies would come who should be ministers of God's vengeance. And again we learn from this place, that even the impious are impelled by the hand and secret direction of God, so that they cannot move a finger but by his will. He had formerly said that he would give the Jews into the hands of strangers; but what now? *I will cause them to come*, says he, as if he would stretch out his hand to them, and induce them. We see, therefore, that God holds the impious under his guidance, as it were, for executing his judgments; but we must consider the difference which I have lately laid down; for God so works by them, as still to have nothing in common with them. For they are carried on by a depraved impulse; but God has a method, wonderful and incomprehensible by us, which impels them hither and thither, so that he does not involve himself in any alliance with their fault. For he calls them *the perverse nation*, that the Jews might know that the last slaughter was approaching, since they should have to do with the most cruel enemies. He says, *shall possess their homes*, and because the pride of the people might seem an obstacle to God's exacting the deserved penalty, therefore he adds, *I will make the pride of the powerful to cease*, says he; for as long as the Jews were swollen with haughtiness and self-confidence, the Prophet could not profit them at all. Therefore he says, that God would make their haughtiness to cease, by which they were vainly puffed up as long as God sustained or bore with them. At length he adds, *their sanctuaries shall be polluted* This passage confirms the opinion which I formerly approved. For Ezekiel speaks of the *pollution of the sanctuary* as of a new thing. For he here draws away from them the vain hope by which they deceived themselves, when they boasted that they dwelt under God's guardianship, since the temple protected themselves and the city. Jeremiah reproves them for trusting in lying words, while they declare that they have the Lord's temple —

“The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord.” (Jeremiah 7:4.)

Our Prophet does not speak openly, but he doubtless shows that their security was false, while they oppose the temple to God, as if the temple were a shield to repel his vengeance. God, indeed, dwelt in the temple, but this condition was added, that he was to be purely worshipped there. But when the temple was polluted, God departed from it, as we shall afterwards see. For this reason the Prophet says, *the enemies should come who should pollute and contaminate the holy places of the people* Hitherto he had not spoken of the temple, but he now adds, *the temple*, that the Jews should not rashly boast in the name of God, as if they held him fixed to themselves. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:25

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| <p>25. Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and <i>there shall be none</i>.</p> | <p>25. Excidium venit, et quaerent pacem et non.¹⁶⁸</p> |
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¹⁶⁷ That is, “the wicked and perverse among the Gentiles.” — Calvin.

¹⁶⁸ That is, “there shall be no peace.” — Calvin.

He confirms the same doctrine. He says therefore, *destruction is come* He now adds, *there shall be no peace* This confirmation was not in vain. For men always hope they shall obtain some advantage by turning their backs; hence they seize on hiding-places whence God draws them into light. Then they form for themselves many hopes of safety when God holds them bound down. Since, therefore, men are so slippery, and, by catching at refuges, think to elude God and his judgments, the Prophet says, though they seek peace they shall find none, that they may not doubt about that destruction and cutting off which he mentions. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:26

26. Mischief shall come upon mischief, and **26.** Calamitas super calamitatem veniet, et
rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they rumor super rumorem erit: et quærent visionem
seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall a propheta, ¹⁶⁹ et lex transibit ¹⁷⁰ sacerdote, et
perish from the priest, and counsel from the concilium a senibus.
ancients.

The Prophet here explains more at length the nature of that slaughter of which he was a herald. And again he deprives the Jews of all ground for hope, and shows that they should look around on all sides in vain, because God would deprive them of all help. This is the meaning of the passage. Hence he says, *calamities shall come*, and that some shall follow one portion, and others another. In this way he advises the Jews that they should catch at security in vain, as if, at the passing away of one evil, they were already free. For the wicked as soon as God with-draws his hand, think themselves escaped from all trouble, and so despise God more carelessly: for they fancy that God has done with them just like a debtor who has paid a small sum to his creditor, and thus has obtained a relaxation, is careless; so the reprobate harden themselves when God grants them some respite: for they think that they have an agreement with him that he should not trouble them more. But the Prophet denounces that there would be such a heap of evils *that one calamity should have many companions*, because God would not cease to add evils to evils. He adds, *rumor upon rumor* This is referred to the object of fear, because rumors of wars and of the cruelty of enemies would be spread abroad. Since, therefore, the Jews are deaf and stupid, the Prophet announces that God would continue exercising his vengeance, so that one calamity should be only the forerunner of another, until they should perish a hundred times rather than that God would suffer them to escape with impunity.

Afterwards he adds, *they shall seek a vision* Here the Prophet again shows that the Jews should be stripped bare of every help. For although they boldly despised God, yet we know that they wickedly abused his name. For they so threw aside all modesty that. they did not hesitate to ridicule God and all his gifts. Hence their last refuge in their calamities was to *seek a vision*, that is, to enquire what God was about to do. Hence he says, *they shall seek a vision from the Prophet*. It

¹⁶⁹ Or, "since there is no prophet." — Calvin.

¹⁷⁰ That is, "shall vanish away." — Calvin.

seems to me that the expression is too abrupt, *that they shall seek a vision from a Prophet*, because nothing is added except concerning the priest and elders. is sometimes taken negatively when words are united: I know not whether the language will properly bear our saying, *they shall seek a vision, but there shall be no Prophet* And yet the sense would flow better, if Ezekiel denied there should be any Prophets: for this is a sign of desertion, when no consolation occurs which assists us in our wars. Thus the Church complains in the Psalms, (Psalm 76:9,) that it was reduced to the greatest straits, and that no Prophet appeared: we do not see our signs, nor is there a Prophet among us. And, in truth, Ezekiel meant that the Jews would seek a Prophet in vain, because God would take away that gift from them. As far then as the sense is concerned there is no ambiguity, though the diction is, as I have said, rather obscure. The meaning is, when they think God so bound to them that he will never deprive them of visions which are prepared for their comfort, yet they are already deprived of this good, and since they are destitute nothing remains except that utter destruction which he has mentioned. We must leave the rest for to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast hitherto deigned to guard us safely by thy power, and hast driven away so many violent assaults from us, and turned away so many perverse counsels of our enemies, and snatched us from numberless evils, — grant that we may so value thy benefits towards us that we may be grateful in return, and so devote ourselves obediently to thee, that thy holy name may be glorified through our whole life in thy only-begotten Son our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY FIRST.

We yesterday began to expound the Prophet's language when he denounced what the Jews little feared, that a time would come when God would deprive them of their Prophets. Since therefore God was accustomed to rule his people by counselors, and priests, and prophets, hence he says, *counsel should perish from the elders, and the law from the priests*. As to the Prophets, he says, the Jews would enquire of them in vain the will of God. The result is, since God always governed his people, there would be miserable dispersion, because no more teaching should shine forth, but they would be immersed in the darkness of ignorance. But this was the most grievous threat, because in extreme evils it is no common consolation to have God shining upon us by his word. For by this we are stirred up to patience, then our sorrows are mitigated when we taste some hope of pardon, and God bears witness that he will be propitious to us. But when this comfort is withdrawn, we are easily overwhelmed by even the smallest evils. Yet God sustains us by his word in the deepest afflictions as upon a vast sea, and as long as his teaching remains to us we have as it were a chart of guidance which will bring us safely into harbor. But when God nowhere appears, the lightest trial buries us in the deepest abyss. So this was the sign of God's fearful vengeance when the gift of prophecy was extinct among the Jews, and the priests and elders had no counsel. For we know how mightily they boasted that were powerful in wisdom. For while Jeremiah blames them, (Jeremiah 18:18,) we see that they rose up against him, relying on this confidence, that the law could not pass away from the priests, nor prudence from the wise men and counselors, nor yet a vision or utterance

from the prophets. “Come ye, let us take counsel against Jeremiah, and let us strike him with the tongue; for counsel shall not *perish*,” etc. Being excited by this diabolical fury they dared to raise their crests against *God*, and boldly claimed for themselves what God here denounces that he would take from them: for the vision they asserted must remain with the prophets and the teaching of the law with the priests. But we see that God averts that perverse boasting when he denounces that there should be no counsel to the old men, no teaching with the priests, and no vision among the prophets. And hence also we gather that we can this day refute the Papists by the same argument. For in the strength of what weapons do they so proudly rage against the clear and certain doctrine of the law and the gospel? Namely, that they are the representative Church, as if they openly declared to God that his doctrine could not possibly perish from their priests. I omit to *notice* that this priesthood is not from God, since priests are created for sacrificing Christ, and that without any command. But suppose we grant them to be ordinary pastors of the Church, of what advantage is that title when God deprived of all light of doctrine the Levitical priests, who were created by him and not by human suffrages?

Let us learn therefore from this passage, that the gift of prophecy and all teaching is God’s peculiar gift: let us learn that this gift is withdrawn when God wishes to exact punishment for man’s ingratitude. For if the doctrine is received less reverently than becomes us, and God himself is despised, as is often the case, he throws men into darkness, and causes them to err through blindness, and deprives them of the least spark of light. when the priests themselves forget their office God infatuates them, as we see has happened in the Papacy. Nothing is more to be despised than those beasts, and yet they claim to themselves the spirit of revelation. But God repays them the just reward of their madness, because they have ruled tyrannically, and so have utterly abused the sacred name of pastors: then because they have mingled their fictions with the law and the gospel, and so have corrupted all purity of doctrine by their comments. God therefore has revenged their pride, as we see; but when God shows us the way of life by his servants, and shines upon us with heavenly doctrine, let us not blindly wander in darkness, let us know that this inestimable treasure is not to be despised, lest we should be deprived of it. It follows —

Ezekiel 7:27

27. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the desolation: ¹⁷¹ et manus populi terrae people of the land shall be troubled: I will do unto turbabuntur: secundum vias ipsorum faciam iis, them after their way, and according to their et pro judiciis ipsorum judicabo ipsos, et deserts will I judge them; and they shall know cognoscent quod ego Iehovah. that I *am* the LORD.

In this verse the Prophet affirms that God’s vengeance should be so common that it should alight equally upon the highest and the lowest. He begins with the king, then he descends to his counselors, then he comprehends the whole people. *The king shall lament*, he says. But it is his

¹⁷¹ Or, “laying waste.” — Calvin.

duty to give life to others, and then to devise a remedy for all evils; but when the king has nothing left but grief and sorrow, it is a sign of despair. He metaphorically clothes the elders in a garment of desolation. We know that a garment has two uses; since it fortifies us as a defense against the cold, and then it hides whatever is dishonorable in us. In the opposite sense the Prophet says, shame shall be as a garment to the elders, and then he goes down to the common people. At the same time, he assigns the reason, I, says he, *will do to them according to their ways* is here taken causally, *according to their ways*, therefore, *will I do unto them*: and in the same sense he adds, *in their judgment will I judge you* The word “*judgment*” is used peculiarly here, and contrary to its ordinary sense. For judgment means the same as righteousness; but it is often transferred to transgressions, as if he had said, they shall feel me a just judge though I avenge their sins. Hence *their judgments* mean perverse abuses, and comprehend not only superstitions but all kinds of iniquities. By these words God intimates that though he should punish the Jews severely, yet it would not be cruelty, because they deserved such treatment. A confirmation follows in the next vision. The vision is, indeed, separate, but as the Prophet had just asserted in God’s name that the punishment was just under which the Jews would suffer, he confirms this doctrine by the vision which follows, when he was seized by the Spirit of God and transferred to Jerusalem, where he saw the temple filled with various abominations; because there was no corner which they had not defiled and violated with their idols. But let us come to the words.

CHAPTER 8

Ezekiel 8:1

1. And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, *as* mensis, ego sedebam ¹⁷² domi meae, et Seniores I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat Jehudah sedentes coram facie mea, et cecidit before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell super me illic manus Dominatoris Iehovae. there upon me.

There is no doubt that a prophetic vision is here narrated; for the Prophet was not carried to Jerusalem, nor had he changed his place, nor were the elders of Judah before him, but he seemed to himself to be seized by the Spirit of God, that he might perceive the pollutions by which the Jews had profaned the temple. For he says, *that he was at home when this vision occurred to him*, and yet it was possible for him to be walking in the field. He does not, therefore, relate the thing as done, but simply teaches how God appeared, and adds the circumstances. By *elders of Judah* I do not understand captives, but those who were then dwelling at Jerusalem, that they should be witnesses of this prophecy, and so all excuse and pretense of mistake was taken away from them. He also expresses the time at which this vision happened, namely *the sixth year*, which he numbers from the exile of Jechoniah, as we saw in the first chapter. Hence an interval of a year and two months has elapsed since the first vision which was then unfolded, and the present which is now to be treated. Since, therefore, fourteen months had elapsed, God appeared again to his Prophet. This circumstance of the time is by no means superfluous, for this shows the great obstinacy of the people. The Prophet, as I have said, numbers the years from the exile of the king. But they were accustomed to count from the jubilee year; but he now renews the grief for that slaughter, when the king was treated ignominiously as a vile captive, and was harassed as a slave by the enemy. Since, therefore, the Prophet humbles the Jews by this computation of years, hence it appears how hardened was their obstinacy, as they did not grow wise though so severely chastened. But we shall see that they were seized with a prodigious madness, so that they cast aside the worship of God, they heaped together on every side new idolatries, and infected the temple with their abominations. We saw in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:17, and Jeremiah 44:17-19) that the worship of God was overthrown in the city Jerusalem, and in the temple itself; for they poured out libations to the workmanship of heaven — others translate, the queen of heaven, but we have shown that those places ought to be understood of all the stars — since, therefore, they offered incense to the workmanship of heaven, then they afterwards took to themselves idols and polluted themselves with the superstitions of all the nations. Our Prophet shows that they were not touched with any sense of their punishment, but that they became worse from the time when God began to raise his hand against them; for it was just as if he had begun to show himself from heaven the avenger of their superstitions. Hence we have a reason why the Prophet here mentions years and months, and even the fifth day of the month, namely, that the Jews may be held more convicted of their obstinacy, since no punishments recalled them into the way, but they wrestled with diabolical obstinacy against God. He says, *the hand of*

¹⁷² Verbally, "sitting." — Calvin

God fell; by *hand* I do not simply understand prophecy as some do, but strength; for the sense seems too restricted to say, God's prophecy fell — the phrase is too cold. But this is properly said of the power of God. It is just as if he professed that he did not bring forward anything of his own, because he put off, as it were, the man whilst Gods power reigned in him. Thus the power of God is opposed to all human faculties. It follows —

Ezekiel 8:2

2. Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the 2. Et aspexi, et ecce similitudo ¹⁷³ tanquam appearance of fire: from the appearance of his aspectus ignis: ab aspectu lumborum infra ignis: loins even downward fire; and from his loins even et a lumbis ejus sursum tanquam aspectus upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the splendoris, tanquam figura chasmal. colour of amber.

Some translate the last word angel, but in my opinion erroneously: for , *gnin*, properly signifies color, and I have already refuted that error in the first chapter. I am not clear as to what color it was, hence I follow the received opinion that, it was like amber. Now the Prophet says, *he saw a likeness*, or image composed of two parts; *for from the loins downward it was like fire, but upwards it was brightness*. By the word , *demoth*, I do not doubt that he means the image of a man. God, therefore, appeared to his servant under some image; nor is the human figure out of place, because if it had been any other figure without doubt the Prophet had been silent. But we have already seen that God had put on the human form, and so represented himself in the person of his only begotten Son, as we have said, and shall see again in the tenth chapter. This, therefore, is the likeness of which the Prophet speaks, but he uses this word on purpose, that we may know that it was not a true and solid and substantial thing called body. As to the Prophet's beholding a figure or likeness, this took place only in a bare vision, not that God then put on a body; and concerning this point also I have treated at length in the first chapter, and shortly I shall glance at it again. Now as to his saying, *one part of the figure was fiery*, but in another, *the aspect of splendor*, he seems here to express what the Jews ought to hope for, when at length they perceived God to be near, from whom they thought themselves very far off, since they so boldly despised his law and all the prophecies. As to the splendor, God's majesty and incomprehensible glory is signified. For if brightness blinds our eyes, what would happen if we endeavor to penetrate to that immense light of which the sun is only a little spark? Since, therefore, Ezekiel says, *there was the likeness of splendor above his loins*, he doubtless shows how formidable the majesty of God ought to be to us. For God dwells in light, but inaccessible, as the Apostle says: *but below*, says he, *was the appearance of fire*, namely, because he must not. wait till the Jews received any joy from the presence of God. (1 Timothy 6:16.) We know, indeed, that hypocrites always boast rashly in the name of God, as Amos reproves them, What is to you the day of the Lord? it is a day of darkness and not light. (Amos 5:18.) For they boast that God would be entreated in their miseries, and that he must assist them, because he had taken them under his protection. The Prophet refutes this arrogance, and says, that the day of

¹⁷³ Or, "image." — Calvin

the Lord would be darkness. So also in this place, God appeared in the form of fire towards the earth, that the Jews should tremble when they saw the vengeance of God lighted up to consume them. Therefore in the splendor God's majesty was shown, which humbled the Prophet and all the pious, that they should receive the vision reverently; for in the fire God's vengeance was shown, lest the Jews should make for themselves too wide a shield of the name of God, which they extended falsely and fallaciously.

Ezekiel 8:3

3. And he put forth the form of an hand, and 3. Et misit similitudinem manūs, et sustulit took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit me in cinctu capitis mei: et erexit ¹⁷⁴ me lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, spiritus inter terram et inter coelum: et adduxit and brought me in the visions of God to me Hierosolymam in visionibus Dei, ad ostium Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that portae interioris, quae respicit Aquilonem: ubi looketh toward the north; where *was* the seat of illic sedes idoli zeli zelare facientis. the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.

The Prophet here relates that he was carried to Jerusalem that he might behold the foul superstitions by which the Jews had defiled the temple. But first he says, *that the form of a hand was put forth* Whence again we collect that the body was not solid or substantial which the Prophet had seen; but was only a visible figure as a symbol of God's presence. This explains the word likeness or figure, for it was not a real hand which seized the Prophet by the locks or hair of the head, but it was the likeness of a hand, and therefore he adds, *in the visions of God it was done*. He says indeed that he was carried up between heaven and earth, but let no one imagine that this was really done, for he explains himself and says, *in the visions of God* By *visions of God* he understands a revelation free from all doubt: for there is a silent opposition between these divine revelations and the spectres which often deceive men's senses. Those who interpret "visions of God" simply as prophecy weaken what the Prophet wished to express emphatically; and those who think God's name used here as an epithet, (as the Hebrews call anything remarkable, divine,) also depart from the genuine sense of the Prophet. There is no doubt, therefore, that he opposes the visions of God to all spectres: for Satan as we know deludes men's senses with his prodigies and his wonderful arts of fascination: for it happens that the children of God are sometimes deluded: hence the Prophet, to take away all doubt from his teaching, says *that he was carried to Jerusalem in visions of God*, and adds, *that he was carried to the northern gate*. We know that there were many gates of the large area, so that the people's entrance should be more commodious. For if there had been only one gate open, they would have been more tumultuous, as a multitude usually is. The area of the temple then had an eastern and a northern gate: then it had other gates, which gave an easy entrance to the people as well as to the priests. The priests indeed had an inner area which was distinct, but when they offered victims on the altar, they mingled with the people. This therefore was the reason

¹⁷⁴ "Raised." — Calvin.

why the floor of the temple had different gates. Now the Prophet says, *that he was carried to the porch of the gate*, so that he did not penetrate directly into the secret part of the temple, but seemed to himself to be standing before the doors, till God informed him of what was doing within. He says, *there was the seat of the idol*. We know not what the idol was, except that the Prophet says it was abominable. He first calls it *the idol of jealousy*, and then adds the participle, *provoking God to jealousy*. But although the noun as well as the verb is often taken in a bad sense, yet God transfers the affection of jealousy to himself, and in this sense he says in Deuteronomy,

“They provoked me: they made me jealous with what is not God: therefore will I make them jealous,” (Deuteronomy 32:21.)

He alludes to the jealousy of husband and wife, for if the woman prostitutes herself, the husband burns with indignation, and that outbreak of his anger is most flagrant, So also when the wife in her turn knows that her husband is an adulterer, she is carried away with intemperance and excess. Hence God, when he shows how he esteems his glory and worship, compares himself to a jealous man, when we turn aside to idolatrous and adulterous worship. In this sense the idol which was in the porch or entrance of the temple is called *the idol of jealousy, and the idol which causes jealousy*. Although we may also translate, it was the seat of the idol causing jealousy, since the noun, *kenah*, is taken in the ablative case. It is said that this idol provoked to jealousy, because the Jews by erecting this idol trod under foot their God, or at least endeavored to prostrate his glory. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 8:4

4. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel 4. Et ecce illic gloria Dei Israel, secundum *was* there, according to the vision that I saw in visionem quam videram in planicie.¹⁷⁵ the plain.

Now he only says that he saw God’s glory as he had formerly beheld it near the bank of the river. This was as it were the seal of his prophecy: for the holy man ought to be so strengthened, that he should boldly restrain the furious audacity and obstinacy of the people. Hence he had to strive with hard heads, and God did not arm him in vain; and to this end again a new vision was offered. He knew that to be the glory of God. Hence he was again made more certain that the whole action was under divine direction, and that it was neither human nor fictitious, nor deceptive nor doubtful. It follows —

Ezekiel 8:5

¹⁷⁵ “It is properly a valley, because *bek-gneh*, is deduced from cutting: for a valley when interposed seems to break the mountains, and prevent their running in a continual track. But it is also taken generally for any plain, and the first vision occurred to the Prophet near the river Chebar, where there were no mountains.” — Calvin.

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| <p>5. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.</p> | <p>5. Et dixit ad me, Fils hominis, tolle ageturn tuos oculos nunc viam septentrionis: et sustuli oculos meos ad viam septentrionis: et ecce a septentrione ad portam altaris idolum illud zeli in introitu.</p> |
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Here one profanation of the temple, is shown to the Prophet, namely, the idol erected at the entrance of the area near the altar. It may happen that the worship of God is but slightly vitiated, so that the corruption is scarcely apparent. But while the Prophet repeats that the idol was *that of jealousy*, he points out the gross and shameful disgrace of that spectacle, so that they could not gloss over their impiety by any pretense, after they had so openly and confessedly revolted from the law of God. But when *he is ordered to raise his eyes to the way of the north*, this also avails for the confirmation of his teaching. For if the Prophet had turned his eyes that way of his own accord, his looking that way would have been of less moment, but when God directs his eyes by express command, the reproach which afterwards follows has more weight. This, therefore, is the reason why the Prophet did not cast his eyes of his own accord towards the idol, as he might have done, but was admonished by God to do so. Meanwhile it appears with what docility he obeyed God's commands. He puts these two things together, *that he was ordered to raise his eyes*, and *that he immediately did so*. We see here that he was so obedient to God's command, that he did not delay but instantly obeyed it. He says, *the idol was near the gate of the altar*, which circumstance exaggerates the crime. If the idol had been erected in any remote corner it would have been an intolerable sacrilege, though the modesty of the Jews had been greater: but when they erected the idol before the altar they flew as it were in the very face of God. If an immodest woman runs after an adulterer, her husband is justly enraged; but if she brings him before her husband, and wantons with him before his eyes, and prostitutes herself to all crimes, then certainly such wanton lust cannot be endured. But such was the audacity of the people, that when the idol was erected before the gate of the altar it seemed like wishing to dethrone the Almighty, and to contaminate his altar by the sight of the idol. It follows —

Ezekiel 8:6

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| <p>6. He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? <i>even</i> the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, <i>and</i> thou shalt see greater abominations.</p> | <p>6. Et dixit ad me, Fili hominis, an tu vidisti quod isti faciunt? abominationes magnas, quas domus Israel faciunt ¹⁷⁶ illic ut procul recedam a meo? et adhuc converte to, ¹⁷⁷ et videbis abominationes magnas.</p> |
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¹⁷⁶ That is, "perpetrate." — Calvin.

¹⁷⁷ That is, "to turn again" — Calvin.

Now God complains with his Prophet; and we must always mark the object and consider God's design, because at the end of the chapter we shall see how severe a vengeance God was about to take on the people. Hence the Prophet prevents those obstreperous reproaches with which the people loaded him through envy, when he chastised them according to their deserts. Hence he doubtless wished the exiles to be persuaded of what they could scarcely conceive, namely, that the destruction of Jerusalem was near. For we have said that those who had been drawn into captivity had displeased him, and wished to return to their country. Since therefore their condition was too grievous and severe, for this reason God wished to testify to them that the last overthrow of Jerusalem was at hand. He does this while he shows the great abominations which reigned in the very temple, whence the Almighty must of necessity appear as the avenger of his glory and worship. The rest to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast treated us so indulgently, and when provoked by our iniquities, hast yet shown thyself a propitious Father to us, that we may no longer abuse thy patience, but return directly to thy way and submit ourselves to thee — and, being humbled by a true sense of penitence, grant that we may be so dissatisfied with our sins, that we may devote ourselves to thee with our whole heart and follow the direction of thy holy calling; until after finishing the pursuits of this rife, we may arrive at that happy repose which thine only-begotten Son has acquired for us by his blood. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY-SECOND.

WE stopped yesterday at that clause when God asks his Prophet, *whether he saw the abominations which the sons of were perpetrating* in the very temple: by which words he not only cites his servant as a witness, but constitutes him in some sense a judge, so that all should know that the coating vengeance was not only just but must be immediate. This is the reason why God asks, *whether he saw the abominations*. For if a mortal is compelled to pass an opinion, surely God, who sees much further than the eyes of man, cannot be ignorant of their crimes, when they had come to such a pitch of obstinacy that his patience could no longer hold out. Now the adverb of place is used, which seems to be put emphatically, because he refers to the temple, from which all filth and defilements ought to be removed. Since therefore God complains that abominations were perpetrated there, he magnifies the people's wickedness, because even the temple did not remain pure. He adds, *for retreating*: some refer this to the people and elicit this sense, that those who so pervert God's worship recede from his sanctuary, because they have no longer anything in common with God. But I rather interpret it concerning God himself, who is compelled to depart from his sanctuary, as we shall afterwards see. For while they so defiled the temple with their sacrilege, they yet thought God included therein. He now renounces the temple, and says, that he left the place empty and void, because he could not bear to dwell among that sordid defilement. The meaning is, that God would depart from his temple, because the complete worship which he had commanded under the law did not flourish there. And this place is worthy of notice, because we gather from it that God could not bear the profanation of his worship, but will leave those who pervert his law by

their fictions, as we see the Jews did. At this day we know how haughtily the Papists pride themselves in their figments, but the more they heap together fictitious ceremonies the more they provoke God's anger. Hence it happens that they vainly boast that they have him in their temples, as they think. For this sentiment will ever remain fixed, that God cannot dwell in a profane place. Now nothing sanctifies a place more than obedience and sincerity of faith. When men introduce their inventions, it immediately causes God to depart from them: this is the full meaning. Now he adds, *turn thyself, and thou shalt see great abominations*. Some translate greater, but because a question would arise, why he calls the abomination first greater and then different, I interpret it simply that the Prophet should see other great abominations. Afterwards indeed he will express another, for he will say , *gedloth-maleh-thogn-both*, but in my opinion there is no comparison here between greater and less; , *maleh*, I simply interpret "*beyond* others," and I rather approve of this simplicity, because interpreters anxiously labor to show this last abomination heavier than all others, though the reason for it does not clearly appear. But there is no need of our making these difficulties, because the Prophet only speaks of great abominations. Let us go on —

Ezekiel 8:7-11

7. And he brought me to the door of the court; **7.** Et induxit me in portam Atrii et aspexi, et and, when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. **et** ecce foramen unum in pariete.

8. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now **8.** Et dixit ad me, Fill hominis, fode agedum in the wall: and, when I had digged in the wall, **parietem: et fodi in pariete, et ecce porta una.** behold a door.

9. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold **9.** Et dixit ad me, Ingredere, et vide the wicked abominations that they do here. **abominationes malas quas ipsi faciunt.**

10. So I went in and saw; and behold every **10.** Et ingressus sum, et aspexi: et ecce omnis form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, **similitudo reptilis, et animalis abominatio, et and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed omnia idola domus Israel, depictum ¹⁷⁸ in pariete upon the wall round about. **circum circa.****

11. And there stood before them seventy men **11.** Et viri septuaginta ex seni-oribus domus of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the Israel, et Iazanias, filius Saphan stabat in medio midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of ipso-rum qui stabant coram ipsis, ¹⁷⁹ et viro ¹⁸⁰ Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; **thuribulum in manu sua: et densiter nubis suffitus and a thick cloud of incense went up. **ascendebat.****

Here now the Prophet is brought to another place, where another kind of abomination is shown. If an idol had been erected in some *recess* of the temple only, even that impiety when joined with sacrilege could not have been borne. But when all parts of the temple were contaminated with such

¹⁷⁸ "There is a change of number from plural to singular. — Calvin.

¹⁷⁹ Meaning "idols." — Calvin.

¹⁸⁰ That is, "to each." — Calvin.

filth, hence we collect that the people was utterly desperate. For the Prophet says, *that he was led into a more secret place*, and since there was a hole there, he dug it by God's command, so that it became a door by which he could enter. This only ought to be understood of a vision. For the Prophet had brought nothing with him with which he could so dig a wall, but when he could only behold that hidden abomination through a chink, God opened the wall. But the Prophet seems to himself to *make* a door of entrance by his own hand. But he says, *there were painted birds, reptiles, and animals*: then he adds, *an abomination and all the idols of the house of Israel*. We see that there was not only one idol, but a great number. And in truth as soon as the true worship of God is *neglected*, men place no bounds to themselves: they are not content with one or two errors, but they heap to themselves numberless delusions. So the children of Israel fell away from one idol to a great multitude. Meanwhile it must be remarked, that the idol which he has mentioned was detestable beyond all others. For it was not called a *provocative of jealousy* without reason, since it inflamed God to jealousy. It is therefore probable that this idol was more noble than others, and held in greater price and veneration, since the unbelievers had greater and lesser deities. But now the Prophet refers to common idols, of which there was a great abundance, but not such great honor. For he says, *that part of the temple was full of pictures all around*. It is indeed certain, that the use of painting was always plentiful, but God wished his temple to be pure from images, lest men, being taken with such enticements, should turn aside directly to superstition. For if we see a man or an animal painted in a profane place, a religious feeling does not creep into our minds: for all acknowledge it as a painting: nay idols themselves as long as they are in taverns or workshops, are not worshipped. If the painter's workshop is full of pictures, all *pass* them by, and if they are delighted with the view of them they do not show any sign of reverence to the paintings. But as soon as the picture is carried to another place, its sacredness blinds men and so stupifies them, that they do not remember that they had already seen that picture in a profane dwelling. This therefore is the reason why God did not admit any pictures into his temple, and surely when the place is consecrated, it must happen that the painting will astonish men just as if some secret divinity belonged to it. Although the Prophet here does not say simply that the walls were full of pictures, yet he says, *that an abomination and the idols of the house of Israel were there*. We see therefore not only that the walls were so decorated for the sake of ornament, but because the people desired to celebrate all the deities whose names it knew to be famous among the profane nations.

Now as to the Prophet's being ordered *to dig through the wall*, we gather from this that superstitions are sometimes so hidden in secret places, that they escape our eyes even while we look at them. For such is the weakness of the human mind, that it does not easily perceive how abominable it is to vitiate the worship of God. Thus the Prophet only looked through a chink, so that he could not form a correct judgment concerning those pollutions; hence he is ordered *to dig through the wall*, just as if God assured him that a thin and obscure view was not sufficient, but that a door must be opened by which he should look in and thoroughly consider what would otherwise be concealed beneath those coverings. Now he says *that he entered and saw the likeness of everything*, and we must remember what I have lately touched upon, that the Jews are here condemned for heaping to themselves a multitude of gods: for it was very disgraceful to worship reptiles and brutes. The worship of a human figure has a specious pretext, for the Greeks, who always seemed to themselves wise above others, and thought the rest of the world barbarians, were deceived in idols referring to the human figure, but it was too base and gross for them to worship an ox, a dog, or an ass, as a god. We see therefore how basely the Jews were blinded who mingled

brutes and reptiles for gods. But it is no wonder that they were so deluded, because Egypt was near, where we know that dogs and oxen, and even cats, were considered deities: nay they worshipped all kinds of herbs. Since therefore the Egyptians imagined that the deity resided in reptiles and unclean animals, as well as in herbs, it is no wonder that the Jews were drawn into these delusions through neighborhood. But since heavenly teaching had shown them the way, such blindness was inexcusable, because *they* could not err so basely without suffocating and so extinguishing the light which had been set before their eyes. But we see how men's audacity breaks forth, when they do not restrain themselves within obedience to God's teaching. He says that pictures *were painted all round* on the wall, which again confirms our observation, that the Jews were inflamed with such desires that they left no space empty, because they wished their eyes to fall upon those figures, which more and more inflamed their superstition.

He says also, *that seventy elders of the house of Israel made incense for their idols* I do not think that the seventy who were chosen for ruling the people are referred to here, though I suppose the Prophet to allude to this number. For we know that from the beginning seventy were set over the people, and were chosen from each tribe, and were united together. But with regard to this place, I think the number seventy is used of those whom, although they were not prefects, they called seniors in respect to their office, not through their age only. Meanwhile we must remember that the Prophet looks to that order, because from the beginning God had wished the seventy to bear rule and hold the government. (Numbers 11:16.) Thus the Prophet signifies that the leaders of the people, who ought to rule others by their counsel, were remarkable for corrupting the worship of God. He puts *Jezaniah, the son of Saphah*, who was probably a man of great repute. Since therefore he excelled in the reputation for prudence and piety, the Prophet wished to exaggerate his crime, because he also, among others, offered incense to idols. What then could remain pure among the people, when he who was esteemed a holy man, so profaned himself among the rest! Hence we see that the Prophet means, that the whole people, from the least to the greatest, was so corrupt, that those who were superior to the rest prostituted themselves to idolatry. He says, then, *that he stood before them, and each had a censer in his hand* Incense was the sign of the greatest veneration, and even this was retained for common use. Hence at the outset of Christianity, when the impious wished to seduce the Christians to idolatry, they only gave two or three grains of frankincense: ¹⁸¹ that was a sign of apostasy: they did not order them to bend the knee before idols, nor to offer sacrifices, but only to smell to a few grains of incense. In sign, therefore, of veneration, the seventy men are said to bear censers or incense dishes. The Prophet adds, *and the incense ascended in a thick cloud*. Here understand the particle of likeness. *The incense ascended as a thick cloud*. I do not doubt that they were profuse, or rather prodigal, in their madness, so as to spare no expense: since idolaters rashly squander all things, when the *intemperance* of their zeal seizes upon them. And this was not considered with sufficient prudence. The Prophet therefore says that it was not common incense, but was dense like a cloud, since they threw it forth in great abundance, so that the offering might be fatter and richer: just as if he had said, that they were so intemperate in their superstitions, that they threw away an abundance of incense, and had all their expense for nothing, and only to satisfy their idols. Now it follows —

¹⁸¹ Plin., lib 10, ep. 2, de Christianis ad Trajanum.

Ezekiel 8:12

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| <p>12. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.</p> | <p>12. Et dixit mihi, An vidisti, fili hominis, quae seniores domus Israel faciunt in tenebris,¹⁸² quisque in absconditis¹⁸³ imaginationis suae? qui dicunt, non rider nos Iehovah, deseruit Iehovah terram.</p> |
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Again God questions his servant: we have explained the reason — that he may pass sentence as a judge on his own people, whence it may be more clearly evident that those who had provoked God were unworthy of any pardon. *Thou seest*, says he, *what the elders do?* Through a feeling of honor he does not here name these *elders of the house of Israel*, but rather reproves their ingratitude, because they so drive others with them into alliance with their impiety. For elders ought to show the way to others. Since, therefore, the profanation of the worship of God took its origin from them, hence their disgrace is increased, and they were worthy of greater reproach. *Seest thou*, says he, *what they do in darkness?* From this word I gather that the place was remote from public observation; for there were near the floor of the Temple many cells and many chambers, as we see in Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 20:2; 1 Kings 6:5.) Since, then, the elders had their apartments there, it is not surprising that a place was shown to the Prophet which they had so stained with their paintings. But he says that they did it *in darkness*, because they kept secret their sacred rites; as also there were mysteries among profane nations, which were not open to any but the initiated. Since therefore the multitude was not thought worthy of those mysteries, it is therefore probable that the place among the Jews of which the Prophet speaks was like a small chapel, which the elders, and those who had authority among the people, retained to themselves. he adds, *each within the recesses* Some translate — in the chambers of their painting; but I take the word , *meshkith*, for imagination, as it is also taken in other places. It properly signifies painting, but it is also transferred to the thoughts of men. Therefore when he speaks of recesses or hidden places, I do not understand chambers, though I do not deny that he alludes to those recesses by which men separate themselves from the multitude, by way of honor. In the meantime he equally reproves those tortuous and perverse counsels which the elders of the people inwardly cherished. For those who think themselves wiser than the vulgar, have some hidden pride, and swell with concealed haughtiness; and therefore they are said by Isaiah to dig for themselves hiding-places to escape from God, while they seem to themselves cunning. (Isaiah 29:15.)

Now, therefore, we see in what sense the Prophet mentions *hiding-places of their imagination*, namely, because they reckon such pictures the mark of the greatest and rarest prudence. This was again prodigious, that the elders so gave themselves up to foul defilements. For among profane nations no religion held the leaders and heads of the people. We shall not find, either among the Greeks or the Latins, any of the higher classes, and of the chief governors, involved in the errors of the common people, but they pretended religion, that they might hold others in obedience. They instituted, indeed, great pomp; they pretended no small degree of reverence; but when they passed their time as friends at home, they laughed at all these trifles. Since, therefore, all the ceremonies

¹⁸² “In darkness.” — Calvin

¹⁸³ Or, “inward places.” — Calvin

of the Gentiles were a laughing-stock to sensible men, this was indeed a detestable prodigy *that the elders of the people of Israel, in a secret place, in the very recesses of their thoughts, fabricated idols for themselves.* Now the cause is expressed why they heaped to themselves that multitude of gods, namely, *because they thought that God no longer regarded them* This passage is badly explained when interpreters think that the elders were epicureans, who dreamt that God *enjoyed* ease and indulgence in heaven. They bring forward other passages, which seem similar but in words only, as where, in the book of Job, the impiety of the multitude is described, he says they think that God walks upon the hinges of heaven. (Job 22:14.) But the Prophet speaks more within bounds. Hence those who take this passage generally, extenuate the force of the doctrine which ought to be elicited from these words. Why, then, had the Jews fabricated so many idols for themselves? because they thought that God no longer regarded them, as I have already explained it; and this was the sign of their gross depravity; for God had chastised them in various ways: they ought to have returned into the way, yet they were so far from repenting, that they rather champed the bit, and thus persuaded themselves to seek other deities. And this impiety has occurred in all ages. At this time it clearly appears in the Papacy; nay, even the blind may even feel it with their hands. For when God afflicts these wretched ones, at first they suppliantly ask pardon; but, when he presses upon them more severely, then they begin to rage and look hither and thither, and have a common proverb — “I know not to what saint I ought to pay my vows.” Boys learn this proverb in the Papacy, and old men always have it on their lips in perplexity. Hence Ezekiel reproves this fault, when he gives this as a reason for the aged heaping up this multitude of deities — that they thought themselves overlooked by God — *Jehovah*, they say, *does not see us here*: they do not speak simply of God’s providence, but indignantly complain of his disregard, because he did not relieve their miseries, and had deserted the land, as they afterwards explain themselves; for they immediately assert that *God had deserted the land* We see, therefore, that they did not speak simply against God’s providence, as if he despised human things, but that they were inflamed with fury, because God’s hand pressed them heavily, and they did not feel any help in him. Hence they descended to brutes, reptiles, various painting’s, and all kinds of abomination, because they thought that they were worshipping in vain the one true God. It follows —

Ezekiel 8:13-14

13. He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, **13.** Et dixit ad me, adhuc con-vertere, et *and* thou shalt see greater abominations that they videbis abominationes magnas quas ipsi faciunt. do.

14. Then he brought me to the door of the **14.** Et deduxit ¹⁸⁴ me ad ostium portae domus gate of the LORD’S house which *was* toward the Iehovae quod respicit ad aquilonem: et ecce illic north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for mulieres sedebant lugentes Thammuz. Tammuz.

¹⁸⁴ Or, “introduced.” — Calvin

He now mentions the third kind of idolatry by which the Jews polluted the temple; for this was a kind of sin peculiar to females; and we know that they were always more addicted to such wickedness. Satan, indeed, fascinates men always more than enough, but in women recklessness reigned more than superstition. They had therefore a female worship in bewailing Thammuz. Who Thammuz was is uncertain. Jerome translates it Adonis, and Adonis was beloved by Venus, as the poets trifle; and when torn to pieces by a boar, he was turned into a flower of sweetest odor; and in honor of Venus women yearly solemnized by lamentations the death of that beautiful youth; but it is not probable that this rite prevailed in Judaea, because we do not read that this lamentation was practiced in the neighboring regions, but in Greece and Asia Minor I refer it rather to Osiris, for, as we said before, the Jews were neighbors to the Egyptians — hence they adopted various rites from them; but we know that Osiris was yearly wept for by the Egyptians, and that great pollution occurred; for they carried the virile member on a pole in procession, and called it Phallus;¹⁸⁵ and women also showed their parts to the idol, as if offering themselves to debauchery. This was a most disgraceful spectacle. But I conjecture that the Jews had adopted this rite when the women bewailed Thammuz. Here also we perceive, that when once Satan has prevailed, and cast men into deep depravity, they despise all moderation, nay, are *reduced* to more than brutal stupor. Who would think this could occur, that women should be reduced to such a pitch of defilement, when they had been taught in the doctrine of the law from their early childhood. But when God's temple was open to such pollutions, we see the Jews so blinded by madness, that God already was showing signs of his extreme *vengeance*, since he had endured them up to this point.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast delivered to us a sure rule of worship, which cannot deceive us, and since thy Son became for us a perfect master of all wisdom and of solid piety, that we may obediently follow whatever he prescribes for us, and turn neither to the right hand nor the left; but being content with that simplicity which we have learnt from his Gospel, may go on in the course of our holy calling, until at length, that pursuit being finished, we may arrive at the perfect state of thy glory, and may so enjoy it that we may be transformed into it, as thou hast promised us by the same Jesus Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY-THIRD

Ezekiel 8:15-16

¹⁸⁵ Herod. 2, c. 48. — *Ed.*

15. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, **15.** Et dixit mihi, Fili hominis, adhuc *O son of man? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt* convertere, videbis abominationes magnas prae see greater abominations than these. istis. ¹⁸⁶

16. And he brought me into the inner court **16.** Et deduxit me in Atrium doritos Iehovae of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door interins: et ecce ad portam Templi Iehovae inter of the temple of the LORD, between the porch vestibulum et inter altare, circiter viginti quinque and the altar, *were* about five and twenty men, viri, posteriora eorum versus Templum Iehovae, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, et facies eorum versus orientem: et ipsi adorabant and their faces toward the east; and they in oriente Solem. worshipped the sun toward the east.

Here the Prophet refers to another profanation of the temple, since the chief citizens of Jerusalem and those who ought to point out the way to others, prostituted themselves to impious worship, lie says, therefore, *that he saw about five and twenty men*, and it is probable, that there were as many as this among the first rank of citizens. But a certain number is put for an uncertain, and I think that the Prophet. was not so scrupulous on this point, or rather the Spirit of God, who showed that number in the vision; whatever it was, they not only worshipped the sun in private houses, but in the temple itself, and that not without gross and pointed contempt of God. For when they turned their back upon the sanctuary, they made a laughing-stock of God. It hence appears, that they were of so daring a front, that they openly boasted in their superstitions, and purposely polluted God's temple. This, indeed, was monstrous, to see the elders of the city, and those practiced in the teaching and worship of the law, so alienated from all piety as to worship the sun. For this could not happen through either error or ignorance. For God in his law when he forbids the worship of the sun and stars, adds as a reason, that the whole celestial host was created for our use. (Deuteronomy 17:3.) Since, therefore, the sun is our servant and the moon our handmaid, and the stars also were created to serve us, it is preposterous to depart from the divinely ordained order, that the sun which was given us to spend his time in our service should be to us a god. Since, therefore, God has borne witness to this in his law, there was no excuse for error when the Jews adored towards the east.

Now he adds also another grosser dishonor done to God, when *they turned their backs upon his sanctuary*. They could, as I have said, pollute themselves at home and in conceal-merit with such defilements. But while they came of their own accord into the temple, it is just as if they provoked God by open daring, Now, when they turn their back, this is not only a foul denial but a contempt of God, as if they had said, that he was unworthy of their respect. Now, therefore, we see the whole force of the passage. But he says, *turn yet again, and thou shalt see great abominations*: some translate greater, as I have formerly mentioned, but I do not think it suitable. I do not contend for it, but if a reason is asked why this abomination is greater than others, it is not clear to me; hence I prefer to take it more simply in the positive degree. Nor is it an objection to this that *maleh*, is added, for *is* is not always taken comparatively; but as I think it means only, as if God had said, you will see other abominations besides those of which mention has been already made. But he points out the place of the temple where they worshipped the sun, namely, *between the porch and the altar*. This was the sign of great impiety to break into the holy place, and from thence to

¹⁸⁶ "Or, "besides these." — Calvin.

despise God. Now we know this to be a sign of lawful adoration, when the faithful turned their eyes to the sanctuary and the ark of the covenant, but when they turned their backs upon it, there is no doubt that they professedly wished to boast in a contempt of God and the law. It already appears, that they had adopted various and numberless forms of superstition. In Egypt they had not seen the worship of the sun, nor do we read that such worship was in use in Chaldea; but because they heard that the Persians and other Orientals worshipped the sun as a god, they imitated their custom. Therefore we see, that from these people they heaped up rites for themselves, so as to make an immense assemblage. It follows —

Ezekiel 8:17

17. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, **17.** Et dixit mihi, Vidisti-ne fili hominis? an O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of leve est domui Iehudah, ut faciat abominationes Judah that they commit the abominations which istas quas feterunt illic? quia repleverant terrain they commit here? for they have filled the land violentia: et conversi sunt ad me provocandum: with violence, and have returned to provoke me et ecce ipsi emittunt ramum ¹⁸⁷ ad nasum suum. to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their ¹⁸⁸ nose.

God complains as formerly of the wickedness of the people, especially of their perfidious and wicked revolt, because they so defiled the temple which ought to be sacred to God alone. He adds besides another complaint, that they were not content in their wickedness, which tended to violate human society and common rights, and the pursuit of mutual equity, unless even religion should be weakened by them. For under the word *chemes*, is comprehended whatever is contrary to the second table of the law. There is, therefore, a use of the figure a part for the whole, in this word *chemes*, violence, as if he had said, they were addicted to frauds, rapine, slaughter, cruelty, perjuries, spoliations. Since, therefore, they abstained from no injustice, says God, they manifestly provoke me also: as if he had said, after being unjust towards men, they now dare to erect their horns against me. We know that God's law was comprehended in the two tables. As to the former table, it prescribes what the true and pure worship of God is. The Jews had violated the second table, since they neglected all the duties of charity, and neither equity nor uprightness flourished among them. *After they had filled the land with iniquity*; this was their intolerable ungodliness, that after despising men they attacked God himself. We see now the reason of the context, *Is this a light thing?* says he. Thereafter he had spoken of the wickedness simply and by itself, as they say, he now amplifies by comparison when he says, *before this they had filled the earth with violence, but now they have turned themselves to provoke me — behold these*, he says, etc. The adverb of place must be noticed here, as I have before advised. For their impiety is the more detestable, since they broke into the temple to defile themselves with their idols. That place at least ought to remain pure and unpolluted,

¹⁸⁷ "Others translate it, a foul *smell*." — Calvin.

¹⁸⁸ "As many think, but I approve of 'to their own wrath,' the word 'wrath' being taken passively for the anger of God which they roused against themselves." — Calvin.

though the whole land had been infected with many defilements; but when not even the temple is spared, this is a sign of desperate and almost furious audacity. He, therefore, repeats the adverb which he had used before, and in the same sense.

As to the latter part of the verse, some, as I have said, take *hez-moreh*, for foulness: I know not why, for I am not aware that this noun is used elsewhere in this sense. But because nothing better occurred to them, they think it probable, and some have invented a foolish fable that they broke wind in honor of the sun, as if the noise of the belly was a grateful offering to the idol, since by this means they openly despised God. But these are conjectures. Others think more correctly who suppose this to be used metaphorically: for they were accustomed to burn incense to their idols; and so, according to them, God alludes to a pleasing and sweet odor when he names it a foul smell, as if he had said, even if the Jews pleased themselves in their superstitions, yet the incense sent forth a foetid odor and they should perceive it: for if he speaks of the nostrils it ought to be considered as a punishment. Some suppose that the relative of the third person is put for that of the first, as if God would say, to my nose or to my wrath: and they fabricate an insipid comment, that this place was changed by the Rabbins through reverence for God, as if forsooth there were not numberless passages where God pronounces in clearer words that he was disgracefully despised. But first, because this noun properly signifies a branch, and is taken in that sense in many places; then since the noun *aph*, may be explained as well passively as actively, the context will flow best if we say, *they put forth a branch to their wrath* — that is, to their destruction, because they provoked God. For what is the meaning of putting forth a branch, but that they heaped evil upon evil. They had violated, as I have said, the second table of the law, they were thieves, robbers, perjurers, and violent. Now at length their rage was directed against the former table of the law, so as to overthrow the whole worship of God. So therefore it will make good sense to say, *that boughs were put forth* — for the singular number is taken for the plural, as often happens. Since, therefore, they so put forth boughs or budded, God says, that this should be for their destruction, *because* at length when he had spared them a long time, after a fit time for their punishment arrived, he would consume them. Now, therefore, we understand what the Prophet means. But if any other conjecture pleases, every one may form his own opinion; I do not contest the point, but I show what I think most probable. It follows —

Ezekiel 8:18

18. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them. **18.** Ego etiam ¹⁸⁹ vicissim faciam in iracundia mea: non parcet oculus meus et non miserebor: et cum elamaverint ad aurem meam voce magna, non audiam ipsos.

This seems to me a confirmation of the last clause. For he had said, that they sent forth their boughs or east them forth, but yet to their destruction. He now repeats the same thing in other words. *Therefore I will also act* in, my turn — that is, as they now boldly increase their superstitions,

¹⁸⁹ “I also.” — Calvin.

and so continually provoke *me*, *at length I will act*, says he. There is a tacit contrast, since God forsooth had ceased for a long time, because there is a certain form of rest when he ceases from his judgments: God seems to rest when he does not *take vengeance* on man's wickedness, when he indulges them and passes them by for a time. Since, therefore, he had so suspended his judgments against the Jews, he seemed to cultivate ease in heaven: with this view he says, *that he would do it in his anger*, and he adds, that his vengeance would be so dreadful that there would be no place for pity. This ought indeed to strike us when God pronounces himself implacable. For what is more formidable than to have God hostile, and to be verily without any hope of pardon? As often as God withdraws his mercy he shows us material for trembling, nor is it wonderful that he threatened the Jews so harshly, because he had proved by all methods that they were desperate in their wickedness. For truly nothing had been omitted towards curing them, unless they had been of an abandoned disposition and of most obstinate manners. Since, therefore, they were such, it is not surprising that God was extremely enraged against them, so that he left them no hope of pardon. But this ought to be referred generally to the whole body of the people: meanwhile it is by no means doubtful, as we shall afterwards see, that God excepts his elect from the ordinary multitude. If any one object, that God always hears prayers, I reply that he never rejects prayers which spring from faith: but here that tumultuous clamor is alluded to which necessity occasions to unbelievers. For although they fly to God as their natural sense impels them, yet they do not this with composed minds, nor even relying upon the promises of God: but because the torture of their minds does not suffer them to rest, so that by a natural impulse they are carried to God and cry to him without any faith or sincere affection. He speaks, therefore, concerning that kind of ejaculation which is described to us in the case of Esau, and hence he says with *a loud voice*, (Genesis 27:34; Psalm 3:4; Psalm 22:2; and Psalm 32:3, and elsewhere often.) Although the faithful also raise their voice: nay even cry out loudly, as David testifies of himself, yet it is *peculiar* to the incredulous to utter their clamor with full cheeks though the mind is void of faith, and is even obstinate in its wickedness. Hence they do not open the heart when they thus cry to God. Hence it is not wonderful if God rejects them and is deaf to their complaints. Now it follows —

CHAPTER 9

Ezekiel 9:1

1. He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man *with* his destroying weapon in his hand. 1. Et clamavit voce magna in aure mea ¹⁹⁰ dicendo, appropinquate ¹⁹¹ praefecturae ¹⁹² urbis: et quisque ¹⁹³ instrumentum perditionis ¹⁹⁴ suae in manu sua.

Now the manner of that vengeance which was lately mentioned is expressed. Hence the Prophet says, God exclaimed, so that his command reached to the Chaldeans, who were to be executors of his vengeance, and therefore the imperative mood pleases me better, *approach ye therefore*. Those who consider the tense past say “visitations,” nor can they do otherwise, because no sense can be elicited from the words — to have approached the prefecture of the city. But if we read the imperative mood, the sense agrees very well, *approach ye the prefecture*: the thing is put for the persons, or the name of the men may be understood, and thus *phekdoth*, may be taken in the genitive *case*. As to the general meaning, God commands his servants who held authority over the devoted city, *to approach*, or apply themselves, or be ready to fulfill his work, and *let each*, says he, *have his instrument of destruction*: here destruction is taken actively. For God does not mean that the Chaldeans were armed for their own destruction, but for that of the Jews, and the ruin of the city. It follows —

Ezekiel 9:2

2. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter-weapon in his band; and one man among them *was* clothed with linen, with a writer’s inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar. 2. Et ecce sex viri venientes e via portae superioris ¹⁹⁵ quae est e regione aquilonis: et cuique ¹⁹⁶ instrumentum mallei sui ¹⁹⁷ in manu sua: et vir unus in medio ipsorum vestitus lineis, et atramentarium scribae in lumbis ejus: et venerunt, et steterunt e regione altaris aenei.

¹⁹⁰ That is, “in my hearing.” — Calvin.

¹⁹¹ Some translate “they have approached” in the past tense, but the other rendering seems to me to suit better, as God commands to approach; “approach ye therefore.” — Calvin

¹⁹² Others translate, “visitations.” — Calvin.

¹⁹³ We must understand, “let him have.” — Calvin.

¹⁹⁴ That is, “his warlike instrument of destruction.” — Calvin.

¹⁹⁵ Or, “lofty.” — Calvin

¹⁹⁶ Verbally, “every man.” — Calvin

¹⁹⁷ Or, “of his breaking in pieces.” — Calvin.

¹⁹⁸ “In a linen garment.” — Calvin

Now the Prophet writes that God's command was not vain or empty, because the effect appears directly by vision. Therefore six men offered themselves. Why again he names six, rather than more or fewer, I have not found out. For some cite the thirty-ninth chapter of Jeremiah, where eight leaders are referred to who were in Nebuchadnezzar's army, and had the chief authority; but first they vary in number, then they twist themselves in many ways. But I am not so anxiously curious, nor does it seem to me of any consequence, unless perhaps God wished to show his servant that a little band was sufficient, and that there was no need of a large army: or by six men he confusedly designated the whole army. It is certain indeed that Nebuchadnezzar came surrounded with a large force to destroy the city; but in the meantime God wished to destroy that pride and contumacy of the people, since he only shows to his servant six men who could destroy the whole city. He says therefore, *that he came by the gate, or by way of a lofty gate*, or higher one, which was towards the north, because Babylon lay towards that region with respect to Jerusalem. It appears therefore that the Chaldeans were here pointed out, to whom the way was direct through that gate, since it ascended from the north over against Jerusalem. He says, *each man had an instrument of destruction*, or of pounding. This word is derived from *nephez*, which is to destroy and rub to pieces: therefore it can be taken as well for the mallet as for the act itself. There is no doubt that the Prophet meant that God's command should not be without immediate effect: because as soon as he cried out, six men were directly at hand for obeying him, which he afterwards expresses more clearly when he says *that they stood near the altar*. For it was a sign of their readiness to obey God's commands when they placed themselves before the altar. But this passage is worthy of notice, because it shows us how anxiously we ought to give heed to God's threats, which are for the most part *directed* against us. In order that we may learn to rouse ourselves from our torpor, here as in a glass the conjunction of God's vengeance with his threats is proposed to us. For as soon as he had spoken, we see that there were six men armed and drawn up for destroying the city. But God wished to show his Prophet this vision, because his business was with a hard and stupid people, as we have already seen. God's voice was as it were their final doom: just as if a trumpet resounded, and announced that there was no hope of pardon unless the enemy gave himself up directly. So therefore *God exclaimed with a loud voice*, but this was no empty cause of fright, because he directly joined the execution of it, when six men appeared before the altar. But he calls *the altar* which Solomon had built of square stones *brazen*: even the brazen altar was not sufficient, but it looks to its first origin.

Now he says that there was among them, one man clothed with a linen garment (1 Kings 8:64.) He is not placed among the multitude, as one among the others, but he is separated, because his signification is distinct. This *man* then doubtless sustained the character of an angel, and it is sufficiently customary in Scripture that angels, when they take a visible form, should be called men: not because they are really men, but because God endues them with such forms as he sees fit. Some, whose opinion I do not altogether reject, restrict this to Christ. But because the Prophet adds no remarkable traits, I had rather receive it generally of any angel. He says therefore, that there was among the Chaldeans, who were prepared to execute God's vengeance, *one man clad in a linen garment*. A distinct mark is sometimes given to angels which separates them from men. The linen garment was then a remarkable ornament. And the sacrificing Papists, as if they were apes, have imitated that custom in their garments called surplices. But since priests were accustomed to be clad in linen robes, here the angel was represented to the Prophet in this garb. Now let us go on, because in the next verse it will be evident why mention was made of that angel.

Ezekiel 9:3-4

3. And the glory of the God of Israel was **3.** Et gloria Dei Israel ascendit ¹⁹⁹ a cherub gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to super quem residebat ²⁰⁰ ad limen domus: et the threshold of the house. And he called to the clamavit ad vi-rum indutum vestibibus lineis, ejus man clothed with linen, which *had* the writer's atramentarium seribae in lumbis erat. inkhorn by his side;

4. And the LORD said unto him, Go through **4.** Et dixit Iehovah ad ipsum, transi per the midst of the city, through the midst of medium urbis, per medium Hierosolymae: et Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of signa signum super frontes virorum qui gemunt, the men that sigh and that cry for all the et clamant super omnibus abominationibus quae abominations that be done in the midst thereof. patiuntur in medio ejus.

Now the Prophet shows why the angel was added to the Chaldeans, namely, to put a bridle on them, lest they should rage promiscuously and without selection against the elect and the reprobate. This is a remarkable passage, because from it we learn, first, that God effectually threatens the impious, so that he may have attendants always at hand to obey him; then, that even unbelievers make war under the direction of God, and are governed by his rod, and do nothing except at his will. Nor are the Chaldeans said to have come to the temple in vain, and to have placed themselves before the altar of God. This is not related to their praise, as if they obeyed God spontaneously, or as if they had purposed to themselves to carry out his commands, but the secret providence of God is here treated. Although, therefore, the Chaldeans gave the rein to their self-will, and did not think themselves divinely governed; yet God here pronounces that they were under his hand just as if God had them as hired soldiers: as Satan is said to have joined himself to the sons of God: this was not a voluntary obedience, but because his machinations could not attack the holy Job, unless by God's command. (Job 1:6.) God's sons appear in a very different way, since they offer a free obedience, and desire him only to reign. But how great soever is the difference between the sons of God and Satan, and all the reprobate, yet it is equally true that Satan and the wicked obey God. This, therefore, we must learn in the second place. But, thirdly, we are taught that God never rashly executes his vengeance without sparing his elect. For this reason in the slaughter of Jerusalem he has an angel, who opposes a shield, as it were, to the Chaldeans, lest their cruelty should injure them beyond God's pleasure, as we shall by and bye see. Therefore I said that the place was remarkable, because when God puts forth the signs of his wrath, the sky is, as it were, overclouded, and the faithful no less than the unbelieving are frightened, nay terrified with fear. For as to outward condition, there was no difference between them. Because therefore the sons of God are subject to that terror which obscures all sense of God's favor in adversity, so this doctrine must be held diligently, namely, when God gives the rein to furious men, so that they dissipate, overthrow, and destroy all things, then the angels are always united, who restrain their intemperance with a hidden bridle, since otherwise they would never be moderate.

¹⁹⁹ "Or, was lifted up." — Calvin.

²⁰⁰ "Verbally, which was above it" — Calvin.

He says, therefore, *that the glory of the God of Israel ascended from the cherub to the threshold* He takes the glory of God for God himself, as we may readily collect from the next verse; for he says that Jehovah had spoken. But this speech agrees very well, because God cannot be comprehended by us, unless as far as he accommodates himself to our standard. Because therefore God is incomprehensible in himself, nor did he appear to his Prophet as he really is, (since not angels even bear the immense magnitude of his glory, much less a mortal man,) but he knew how far it was expedient to discover himself, therefore the Prophet here takes his glory for himself; that is, the vision, which was a sign or symbol of the *presence* of God. But he says *that it ascended from the cherub* Here also is a change of number, because God is said everywhere to sit between the cherubim. (2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16.) But here only one cherub is put, but this figure of speech is well understood, as it is so common, for God resided between the cherubim: it is said *that he went thence to the threshold of the temple* This was a prelude to departure, as we shall afterwards see. And this testimony was needful to the Jews, because they thought that God was bounded by the visible temple. Hence the Prophet shows that God was not fixed to a place, so as to be compelled to remain there. This is the reason why it is said *that he came from his seat to the threshold of the temple* Now, he adds, *that he cried out to the man clad in the linen garment, and whose inkhorn was by his side*, though others translate it writing-tablets: but as he afterwards says, *write on their foreheads*, it is very probable that the ink was in his girdle, that he might mark the elect of God, that the Chaldeans should not touch them. Again he calls the angel a man, but on account of the form which he put on, as I said before. I cannot proceed further.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast deigned to approach us so familiarly, that in return we may also desire to approach thee, and remain in firm and holy union; so that whilst we persevere in that lawful course which thou prescribest for us in thy word, thy blessings may increase towards us, until thou leadest us to fullness, when thou shalt gather us into thy celestial kingdom, by Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY-FOURTH.

We began to explain the precept given to the angel before God sent forth the Chaldeans to cut off the city, and destroy the people. The angel is at length commanded to sign the foreheads of all the pious. But many take the noun , *tho*, which means the same as a mark, for the last letter of the alphabet, and yet there is no reason to compel them to do so. , *tho*, is a Hebrew mark. It is puerile to invent that subtle comment, that the foreheads of the pious were signed with that letter, because the noun , *thoreh*, which signifies the doctrine of the law, begins with the same letter. Jerome brings forward another figment: he says that in his time, among the Samaritans, the letter was like a cross, with which the Christians used then to sign themselves. But all see how nugatory this is. Although it was not the figure which is now in use among the Papists, but was the mark which the brothers Antonii used: but I omit that as unworthy of mention. If puzzles please you, it would be a better reason why the faithful were marked with the last letter, because they were last among

men, and as it were the offscouring of the world. Since therefore from the beginning, the world has treated the sons of God as if they were castaways, therefore I have said that they may be signed with the last letter: but we may be content with the simple and genuine sense of the Prophet: therefore God orders their foreheads to be signed. We yesterday explained the cause, and said that a most useful doctrine could be collected from this place, namely, when all things seem mingled on the earth, and turned upwards and downwards, yet that God never casts away the care of his own, but protects them from all harm. God therefore always restrains his judgments, so that he really proves that the safety of his people is dear and precious to himself. We gather also that angels are ministers of this grace, because they watch over the safety of the faithful, as Scripture everywhere testifies. (Psalm 91:11, 12, and elsewhere often.) Now, if any one asks what this sign was? it must be simply answered, that this vision was presented to the Prophet for the common perception of all; for if we wish to single out a few in a crowd, we need some sign. God therefore here borrows what we read concerning a sign from the customs of men: for the faithful could not otherwise understand that they were beyond the reach of weapons, when mixed with the unbelieving. Because therefore it seems the common condition of all, they might be frightened just as if God should raise his hand to chastise their sins. Therefore he says here, that they were signed in some way. It is true then that we daily bear a sign by which God distinguishes us from the reprobate. For the blood of Christ reconciles us to the Father, as is sufficiently known; but perhaps that also may be too far-fetched. It is also true that when God struck the land of Egypt, the Israelites were passed over by the angel, since the blood of a lamb was sprinkled on the door-posts. (Exodus 12:22, 23.) Every house which had the mark of blood was secure and safe, when God's vengeance was inflicted upon all the Egyptians. But as to this passage, I interpret it thus: when God gives liberty to unbelievers, so float they seem to be able to overturn the whole world, the angels are at the same time sent forth, who hinder their lust that they should not touch the sons of God. This then is sufficient for us.

Now the Prophet adorns the faithful with various titles, when he says, *upon the foreheads of men who groan and cry*. There is a great likeness between these two words, *anek*, and *aneh*; but one is written by K final, and the other by *h*. He says then, *that the faithful groan over the abominations*: and then, *that they cry out*: for thus they translate the latter clause, although it may also be taken for bewailing, if we only understand outward sorrow, and that which openly appears. Hence we gather how God receives us under his guardianship, and sends us his angels as protectors, so that if mixed with the impious, we may yet keep ourselves undefiled by their pollutions, and then when we cannot correct their wickedness, yet we bear testimony by grief and sorrow that they displease us. When the Apostle commends to us the patience of Lot, he says, that he tormented his heart while he dwelt in Sodom. A single stranger could not recall those abandoned ones to a sound mind, who had given themselves over to all wickedness. (2 Peter 2:7.) But he did not grow hardened to the foulness of so much sin, but continually groaned before God, and Was in perpetual grief. The Prophet now bears the same witness *concerning* other believers. Whatever it is, God here shows what he wishes his sons to be. Therefore if we allow ourselves to approve the sins of the impious, and take pleasure in them and applaud them, we boast ourselves in vain to be God's sons, because he does not reckon any among his own who do not groan at abominations. And truly this is the sign of too much sloth, when we see the sacred name of God made the subject of ridicule, and all order overthrown, and yet are not affected with grief. Nor is it surprising if we are involved in the punishment of sins which our own connivance has fostered, instead of their being a torment to us. For that exhortation must be remembered, that the zeal of God's house may eat us up, and the

reproaches of those who reproach God may fall upon us, (Psalm 69:10,) as it is said elsewhere, May my tongue cleave to my palate, if I am unmindful of thee, O Jerusalem, at the summit of my mirth. (Psalm 137:6.) Therefore when we see on one side the name of God trodden as it were under foot, and all justice violated, we see on the other side the Church of God miserably and cruelly afflicted, if we smile in security, by this very thing we sufficiently show that we have nothing in common with God, and in vain we call him Father. Hence these titles must be marked, by which the Prophet marks all God's elect, when he says, *whosoever groan over the abominations*: then he adds the word, *crying out*, the better to express the ardor and vehemence of their zeal, — just as if he said that groaning was not sufficient, as many groan in a corner, when they see the whole order of God so perverted, but when they *come* to the light and the sight of men, they dare not give any sign of the least suspicion, because they are unwilling to incur hatred and ill-will. The Prophet therefore here exacts more from the sons of God than secret groaning, when he wishes them to groan openly and vociferate; so that they bear witness that they abominate those things which God has condemned in his law. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 9:5-6

5. And to the others he said in mine hearing, 5. Illis autem dixit in auribus meis, Transite
Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let per civitatem post eum, percutite: et ne parcat
not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: oculus vester, et ne misereamini:

6. Slay utterly old *and* young, both maids, 6. Senem, adolescentem, puellam, puerum et
and little children, and women: but come not near mulieres percutite ad internecionem: tamen ad
any man upon whom *is* the mark; and begin at omnem virum super quem fuerit signum, ne
my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient accesseritis, ²⁰¹ et a sanctuario meo incipite: et
men which *were* before the house. inceperunt a viris sentortibus qui erant coram
domo.

Now the Prophet adds, that the Chaldeans were sent to destroy the city and its inhabitants, but the order must be observed, because they are ordered to go *behind the angel*. The grace of God therefore precedes to the safety of all the pious: then he opened the gate, and made a way open for his wrath, long and wide, after he had removed the faithful from all danger: for this reason it is said, *that he went through the city yet after him*. And Patti also signifies this, when he says, after that your obedience has been fulfilled, then wrath is at hand against all rebels and proud ones. (2 Corinthians 10:6.) God therefore first cares for his own; but after he has received them into his keeping, and hid them as it were under his wings, then he permits the flame of his wrath to burn against all the wicked. In fine, we see that as often as God revenges man's wickedness, he regards his Church, and treats all as worthy of peculiar care who are endued with true and serious piety.

Then *he orders them to strike, so that their eye should not spare*; what God had taken to himself he transfers to the Chaldees, because there ought to be an agreement between God and all his servants, even those who are not voluntary agents, but whom he bends every way by his secret

²⁰¹ Or, "do not touch those who bear the mark." — Calvin.

instinct. Then he expresses more clearly, *that they should not spare either old men or young men or boys or girls*; as if he said, that he must rage against all promiscuously, without any choice of age or sex. He here opposes women to men, because that sex bends even the most cruel to pity, and we know that when men are slain, women are preserved. Now girls seem to hold a better position and boys also: and decrepit old men, because nothing is to be feared from them, are *preserved* safe. But God wishes the Chaldeans so to attack the whole city, that they respect neither age nor sex. Meanwhile he excepts the faithful of whom he had spoken, *upon whomsoever the mark shall be, do not approach him*. Here it is asked, were all the good preserved free from slaughter? for we know that Jeremiah was drawn into Egypt, to whom Chaldaea would have been a preferable place of banishment. Already Daniel and his companions had been snatched away before him, many were faithful in that multitude. On the other hand, we see many despisers of God either escaped or left in the land, as Nebuchadnezzar wished the dregs of the people to remain there. But we saw of what sort they were in Jeremiah. It follows therefore that God neither spared all the elect, nor made a difference in consequence of the mark, because the wicked obtained safety as well as the faithful. (Jeremiah 39:10; Jeremiah 43:2, 3, 4; Jeremiah 44:15, 16.) But we must observe, although God apparently afflicts his people with the ungodly, yet they are so separated, that nothing happens which does not tend to the safety of the righteous. When therefore God forbids the Chaldeans to approach them, he does not mean them to be free from all injury or disadvantage, but he promises that they should be so separated from the ungodly, that they should acknowledge by sure experience that God was never forgetful of his faith and promise. Now therefore we see how that difficulty must be solved, since God does not so spare his own as not to exercise their faith and patience, but he does spare them so that no destruction happens to them, while he is always their protector. But when he seems to give license to the impious, he grants this to their destruction, because they are rendered more and more inexcusable. And this daily *experience teaches* us. For we see that the very best are so afflicted, that God's judgment begins with them. We see meanwhile that many reprobate exult with joy, even when they wantonly rage against God. But God has the care of his own as if they had been sealed, and separates them from the ungodly; but their own destruction remains for the ungodly, and they are already held within its folds, although it is not yet perceptible by the eye.

It follows, *begin at my sanctuary*. By the word "sanctuary" the priests and Levites are doubtless intended, and their fault was clearly greater. There was indeed a small number who worshipped God purely, and stood firm in their duty, but the greater part had revolted from the worship of God. Hence this passage ought to be understood of those impious priests who had despised God and his servants. Nor is it surprising that God's wrath should begin with them. For they sin doubly; because if any private man fall away, his example is not so injurious as that of the eminent, who thus draw all men into the same ruin. For we know that the eyes of the multitude are turned towards their superiors. Since therefore the priests sinned more severely than all the rest, it is not surprising if God should punish them in the first place. Those who interpret this sentence generally, as if God ordered the Chaldeans to begin from his Church, extenuate the sense of the Prophet too much. For this is not a comparison between the Church of God and profane nations, but God rather compares the ministers of his temple with the people in general, and a clearer explanation follows directly after, *that the Chaldeans began from the men, the elders who were before the house*; that is, who were *set over the temple* Now it follows —

Ezekiel 9:7

7. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. 7. Et dixit ad eos, poiluite ²⁰² domum, et implete altaria occisis egredimini: et egressi sunt, et percusserunt in urbe. ²⁰³

Here God. repeats what he had formerly touched upon shortly and obscurely, namely, that the Jews trusted in vain in the visible temple, because already he had ceased to dwell there, as we shall afterwards see that he had departed. He had promised that his perpetual dwelling should be there, (Psalm 132:14,) but that promise is not opposed by the casual desertion of that dwelling-place. Now therefore he adds this sentence, when he orders the Chaldeans *to pollute the temple itself* But it was already polluted, some one will say: I confess it: but it regards the Common perception of the people; for although the Jews had infected the sanctuary of God with their wickedness, yet they boasted that his worship still remained there and his sacred name. Now therefore he speaks of another kind of pollution, namely, that *the Chaldeans should fill all the area with the slain* If a human corpse or even a dog was seen in the sanctuary, this was an intolerable pollution; all would cry out that it was portentous. But as often as they entered the temple, although they dragged their crimes into God's presence, (for they went there polluted with blood, rapine, fraud, perjuries, and a whole heap of guilt,) yet they reckoned all these pollutions as nothing. God therefore here obliquely derides their sloth, when he says that they boasted of the sanctity of the temple in vain, because they should see it at length filled with corpses, and then should really acknowledge that the temple was no longer sacred. Now therefore we understand the intention of the Holy Spirit. He adds, *that they had gone forth, and occasioned a slaughter in the city* Here again the Prophet shows that the Chaldeans would be at hand to smite the Jews with terror, as soon as God commanded them to destroy the city and cut off the inhabitants. Perhaps the city had not yet been besieged, and that is probable, for the Jews thought Ezekiel's threatenings fabulous. For this reason he says that the Chaldeans appeared to him, that they might hear or receive the commandment of God: then *that they had returned from the slaughter*, to prove their obedience to God. In fine, he shows that God's threatenings should not be in vain, because as soon as the right time should arrive, the army of the Chaldeans would be prepared for obedience. It follows —

Ezekiel 9:8

8. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? 8. Et factum est eum percuterent relictus fui ego: et cecidi super faciem meam, et clamavi, et dixi Aha ²⁰⁴ Dominator Iehovah, an delebis tu quidquid residuum est Israelis? ²⁰⁵ fundendo iracundiam tuam super Ierusalem.

²⁰² Or, "contaminate." — Calvin.

²⁰³ That is, "they made a slaughter or destruction in the city." — Calvin.

²⁰⁴ Or, "oh!" — Calvin.

²⁰⁵ Or, "all the reliques of Israel." — Calvin.

The Prophet does not so carefully preserve the historical order in the context of the words. For he says, *the Chaldeans had returned* He afterwards adds, *while they were striking the city that he fell upon his face*. But we know this to be sufficiently common among the Hebrews, to relate first what is done afterwards. Although the Prophet seems *to have fallen upon his face* a little after their return, *i.e.*, as soon as he perceived the city to have been nearly destroyed; yet he says, *while they were smiting, he himself was left*. They think the word compounded of the past and future tense, because there can be no grammatical reason that the word should be one and single. Indeed the word seems compounded of the first and third persons, as if he would say that he was left alone when all the rest were perishing. Yet there is no ambiguity in the sense; for it signifies that the Chaldeans had so attacked them everywhere, that they left none remaining. Since, therefore, they raged so savagely against the whole multitude, the Prophet seemed to himself to remain alone, as if God had snatched him from the horrible burning, by which he wished the whole people to be consumed and perish. Now if any one should object, that they were not all slain, the answer is, that a slaughter took place which almost destroyed the name of the people; then the survivors were like the dead, because exile was worse to them than death itself. Lastly, we must remark that the prophecy was extended to the last penalty, which at length awaits the ungodly, although God connives at them for a time, or merely chastises them moderately.

In fine, the slaughter of the city was shown to the Prophet as if all the citizens had utterly perished. And so God wished to show how terrible a destruction pressed upon the people, and yet no one feared it. Now as the Prophet *fell upon his face*, it was a testimony of the human affection, by which he instructed the people although unworthy. Hence he fell upon his face as a mediator, for we know that when the faithful ask pardon of God, they fall upon their face. They are said also to pour forth their prayers for the sake of humility, because they are unworthy to direct their prayers and words upwards. (Psalm 102:1.) Therefore Ezekiel shows that he interceded for the safety of the people. And truly God was unwilling that his servants, under pretense of zeal, should cast off all sense of humanity, so that the slaughter of the people should be their play and joke. We have seen how anxiously Jeremiah prayed for the people, so that he was at length entirely overwhelmed with grief; for he wished, as we see in the ninth chapter, that his eyes flowed down as fountains. (Jeremiah 9:1.) Hence the Prophets, although they were God's heralds to promulgate his wrath, yet had not altogether put off all care and anxiety; for when they seemed to be hostile to the people they pitied them. And to this end *Ezekiel fell on his face before God* And truly that was a grievous trial, which he did not disguise; for he complains that a populous city was destroyed, and women and boys slain promiscuously with men. But he lays before God his own covenant, as if he said, even if the whole world should perish, yet it was impossible for God to lose his own Church, because he had promised, that as long as the sun and moon shone in heaven, there should be a seed of the pious in the world. "They shall be my faithful witnesses in heaven," said he. (Psalm 89:37, 38.) The sun and moon are remaining in their place: therefore God seemed to have broken his covenant when he destroyed the whole people. This is the reason why the Prophet lies on his face, as if astonished, and exclaims with vehemence, *Alas! O Lord God, wilt thou destroy the remnant of Israel by pouring forth thine anger?* that is, whilst thou so purest forth thine anger against Jerusalem — for that city remained as a testimony of God's covenant; for as yet some safety could be hoped for; but although after it was cut off, the faithful wrestled with that temptation, yet the contest was hard and fatiguing; for no one thought that any memorial of God's covenant could flourish when

that city was extinct. For he had there chosen his seat and dwelling, and wished to be worshipped in that one place. Since, therefore, the Prophet saw that city destroyed, he broke forth into a cry, what then will become of it! For when thou hast poured forth thine anger against Jerusalem, nothing will remain left in the city. Hence also it will readily be understood, that God's covenant was almost obliterated, and had lost all its effect. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 9:9

9. Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not. 9. Et dixit mihi, iniquitas domus Israel et Iehudah magna supra modum, ²⁰⁶ et repleta fuit terra sanguinibus, et urbs repleta fuit perverse: ²⁰⁷ quia dixerunt, Deseruit Iehovah terram, et Iehovah non respicit.

Here God so answers his Prophet, that he restrains too much fervor, and at the same time asserts his own justice — for the Prophet might be impelled this way and that — he might even doubt whether God would be true to his word. God might also shake his confidence in another manner, as by raging too much against the innocent; since therefore he might be agitated amidst those waves of trial, what God now does ought to set him at rest. Therefore, as I have already said, he mitigates the feelings of his Prophet, and at the same time asserts the equity of his judgment against all false opinions which are apt to creep over us when God's judgments do not answer to our will. Meanwhile it must be remarked, how the Prophet complains suppliantly of the slaughter of the city, and although he seemed to expostulate with God, yet he submitted all his senses to his command, and on that account an answer is given which can calm him. Whenever, therefore, God does not seem to work as our carnal reason dictates to us, we may learn, by the Prophet's example, how to restrain ourselves, and to subject our reason to God's will, so that it may suffice us that he wills a thing so, *because* his will is the most perfect rule of all justice. We see that Prophets sometimes complain, and seem also to permit themselves too much liberty when they expostulate with God, as we saw a memorable example in Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 12 and Jeremiah 20.) Then we read also a similar one in Habakkuk. (Habakkuk 1:2.) How so? Do the Prophets contend with God himself? yea, they directly return to themselves, and collect into order all those wandering opinions by which they perceive that they were greatly disturbed. So also our Prophet, on the one hand, wonders at the slaughter of the city, and exclaims vehemently; at the same time *he falls upon his face*, and in this way testifies that he would be obedient, as soon as God answered him. This is the reason, then, why God also desires to appease his servant; nor is it doubtful that we shall experience the same thing, if we modestly and soberly learn to enquire when God's judgments do not answer our opinions. If, therefore, we approach God in this way, he will doubtless show us that what he does is right, and thus supply us with material for rest. Hence, also, God's inestimable indulgence toward his people is collected, because he so deigns to render a reason, as if he wished to satisfy them. It is certain that men are

²⁰⁶ “For thus I interpret , *bemad mad.*” — Calvin

²⁰⁷ “Understand judgment, but it signifies simply revolt.” — Calvin.

carried forward into too much rashness, as often as they ask questions of God; for who will dare to oppose himself to his judgments? and who will reply to him? so Paul says. (Romans 9:20.) But God in his amazing goodness, descends even thus far, so as to render a reason of his deeds to his servants, to settle their minds, as I have said.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou didst formerly chastise thy people so harshly, that we may profit by their example; and may we be so restrained by fear of thy name and obedience to thy law, that thou mayest not pour forth thy wrath against us: then if thou chastisest us, grant that it may all turn out to our good: and may we so feel ourselves to have been sealed by thee, and to be acknowledged in the number of thy sons, until at length thou shalt gather us into that blessed inheritance which has been obtained for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY FIFTH.

We began yesterday to explain God's answer, when he restrains the Prophet's feelings: for he complained of the destruction of the whole nation. There was a specious reason for it, because he thought that in this way God's covenant was made vain. But God simply answers, that he does not exceed propriety in punishment. The question is not answered in this way: for the Prophet might still doubt how God's covenant remained firm and yet the people was cut off. But God does not in every way untie all the knots by which we are entangled: hence he leaves us in suspense, but while he does this, he wishes to prove our modesty, for if he satisfied us altogether, there would be no proof of our obedience. But when he commands us to acquiesce in his judgment, if we do not pass beyond it, then we bear ourselves towards him as modestly as becomes us. Thus, therefore, he now answers half the question of his Prophet when he pronounces, *that the sin of Jerusalem and Judah is grievous* But he says, *beyond measure*, that the Prophet may understand that the *city*, together with the nation, was to be utterly *destroyed*, since there was no end to its wickedness. When he says, *the land was filled with bloods, and the city with perverse judgments*: bloods we may take for slaughters, or, generally, for all kinds of sin; for the Scripture sometimes calls atrocious crimes which deserve death, bloods, but it sometimes calls unjust slaughters so. But because God embraces all the sins of the people, I readily interpret bloods as crimes, by which those who had so often provoked his anger, brought destruction upon themselves.

It follows, *because they said, Jehovah has deserted the land, Jehovah sees nothing* We had a similar sentence a little before, (Ezekiel 8:12,) and I then hinted that it was taken too coldly by interpreters, because they think that the Jews were Epicureans, who thought that God enjoyed his own ease, and did not regard human affairs. They think, therefore, that the Jews were so inebriated by a brutish contempt of God, as to think they could do as they pleased with impunity, since God was afar off: as at this time profane men allow themselves so much license, because they do not set God before their eyes, as the Scripture often says. But we said that the Prophet intended something else. For when the Jews had been often chastised, they were hardened in their sins, and when they ought to acknowledge that those punishments were justly inflicted upon them, they imagined that

all things happened to them by chance; just as unbelievers reckon all events as fortuitous. Such then was the sloth of the people. God was visiting them, as he often says, that he would be known among them as a judge: when they felt God's hand present with them, they said he was far off, because he did not succor them in their miseries, nor offer himself as a shield against their enemies. For their fathers had experienced the helping hand of God in all their dangers. Since, then, God had cast away all regard for them, and showed himself rather their enemy than the defender of their safety, they said that he was afar off. And as we saw, he had stirred up the Chaldeans, and was then proving the faithfulness of all his prophecies when he was executing what he had denounced by his servants. Now, therefore, we see in what sense they said, *that God had deserted the land*, because, in truth, he was not granting it any taste of his favor. But they experienced his power in another manner when he executed his punishment upon them. Why then did they not think him a just avenger when he thus chastised them? But they laid hold of one thing, that they were not so regarded by God as to be rescued from their enemies. This passage then is worthy of notice. For when God not only invites wretched men to himself, but also draws them to receive the punishment due to their sins, they are often rendered more obstinate, and fancy that God' is afar off. Hence, therefore, it happens that they are seized with madness, and hesitate not to provoke him more boldly. This perverseness is now described when Ezekiel represents the Jews as saying, *that God had deserted the land* For they are unable to see in it anything more than this; for when profane men once take up the principle that they are deserted by God, they think at the same time that whatever they do escapes his notice. But this was the extreme of impiety: hence God shows, that he could no longer spare men so abandoned. And he confirms this also in the next verse when he says —

Ezekiel 9:10

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| <p>10. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; <i>but</i> I will recompense their way upon their head.</p> | <p>10. Etiam <i>ego</i>, non parcet²⁰⁸ oculus meus, et non miserebor: vias ipsorum in capita eorum reddam.</p> |
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Now God pronounces the Jews to be so obstinate in their malice as to have cut off from themselves all hope of pardon. For when he now says, *that he would be hostile to them without pity*, he shows the necessity of taking vengeance, because their impiety had penetrated even heaven, so that he could not spare them without denying himself. And abrupt speech increases vehemence, as if God pronounced that he had changed his plans. Now then we understand the meaning of this answer, that the Jews were bound by so many and such impious crimes, that they had closed the door of God's pity: nay, they had compelled him to the utmost pitch of vengeance, because they continued to provoke him more and more. Let us learn then from this passage not to weigh God's judgments in our scale, because we are too much accustomed to extenuate our sins, and to treat our serious iniquities as but slight errors, because we do not attribute just honor to God as the only judge. Now when God commands his Prophet to rest and be silent, without doubt he at the same time restrains that rashness of ours by which we burst forth in disobedience when he seems to us

²⁰⁸ "Them." — Calvin.

to be too rigid. But, as I have said, we do not consider the greatness of our sins. Therefore it is God's province alone to pronounce concerning sins, that no mortal should estimate the quality of actions, for then we trench on God's peculiar office. It follows —

Ezekiel 9:11

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| <p>11. And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which <i>had</i> the inkhorn by his side, reported the atramentarium erat in lumbis, reversus retulit matter, saying, I have done as thou hast dicendo, Feci quemadmodum praeceperas ²⁰⁹ commanded me.</p> | <p>11. Et ecce vir indutus lineis vestibus, cui <i>mihi</i>.</p> |
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This sentence confirms what I said yesterday about God's paternal anxiety towards the faithful. For the Prophet taught, before God would permit the Chaldeans to destroy the city, that an angel was sent before to succor the elect, and thus to oppose himself to the violence of the enemies: where we have said that it is shown to us as in a glass that God holds this order in his judgments, that his fatherly love towards the faithful always precedes them, so that he does not permit anything to happen to them but what tends to their safety. For this reason the angel now says, *that he had done as he was commanded*. Doubtless the obedience of the angel is reported to us, because it answers to the will of God. Hence, therefore, we gather that the safety of the faithful is always precious to God, and therefore they will always be safe and secure when we think heaven and earth mingled together. This then is the explanation. Now follows —

²⁰⁹ Or, "commanded." — *Calvin*.

CHAPTER 10

Ezekiel 10:1

1. Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.

1. Et aspexi, et ecce super expansionem quae erat super caput cherubim tanquam lapis sapphiri, sicut aspectus similitudinis solii quod videbatur super eos.

Here the Prophet relates another vision which has a great likeness to the first which he related to us in the first chapter, but it has another object, as we shall soon see. Since we discussed the chief members of the vision in the first chapter, I shall now therefore be shorter. I shall only glance at what I formerly said, and at the same time point out any difference. But before we descend to that, God's design in this vision must be understood. God wished to bear witness to the Jews that he had nothing further in common with them, because he intended to leave the temple, and then to consume the whole city with burning. But lest this threat should be unheeded by the Jews, God's majesty was placed before them so fearfully that it might strike even the obstinate with fear. Now I come to the words. He says, *that he saw again over the heads of the cherubim a throne, whose color was like sapphire*. Instead of living creatures he now puts cherubim, and there is no doubt that those living creatures of which he formerly spoke were cherubim. But because the vision occurs in the temple, God begins familiarly to explain to his servant what was previously too obscure. For he had seen the four living creatures near the river Chebar, namely, in a profane country. When therefore the Jews and Israelites were absent as exiles far from the temple, it is no wonder that God did not appear so clearly to his Prophet as he now does when brought into the temple. For although the Prophet has not changed his place, yet he does not seem to have been transferred to Jerusalem in vain, and to behold what was done in the temple. This is the reason why he now calls those cherubim which he had before called simply living creatures. But we have explained why four cherubim were seen, while only two were in the sanctuary, namely, because the Jews were almost buried in gross ignorance. They had long ago departed from the pursuit of sincere piety, and the light of celestial doctrine had been almost extinct among them. Since, therefore, the ignorance of the people was so gross, something rude must be put before them, or otherwise they could not understand what they ought to learn.

Now it is by no means doubtful that God obliquely wishes to reprove that base ignorance, because it was not his fault that they did not perceive in the law and the temple whatever was useful to be known for their salvation. *When*, therefore, God changes this legal form, there is no doubt he shows how degenerate the people was, just as if he had transfigured himself. But we must also remember what I then said, that four cherubim were offered to the Prophet that God might show that he embraced the whole world under his own dominion. We saw a little while ago, that the Jews, While they thought themselves already without God's care, being thoroughly callous, were so blind that they supposed at the same time that God exercised no care over the world. In vain, therefore, in their perverse imaginations they shut up God in heaven; he shows that he rules the whole universe, and that nothing moves except by his secret power. Since then four cherubim are

put instead of two, it is just as if God showed that he reigned throughout the four quarters of the globe, and that his power is extended in all directions, and hence that it was the height of impiety for the Jews to imagine that he had deserted the earth Thirdly, we must remark what has also been said before, that the cherubim had four heads, that God might show that angelic motions flourish in all creatures. But I shall repeat this last comment in its proper place. I now only touch it shortly.

We must now see why the Prophet says, *there was a throne whose color was like sapphire, and the throne itself was above the four cherubim*: because in truth God has his angels at hand to obey him: hence they are placed under his feet, that we may know that they are not independent, but are so subject to God that they always depend upon his nod, and are borne wherever he commands them. This is the reason *why they were placed under the expanse where God's throne was* As far as the expanse is concerned, it is the noun which Moses uses in relating the creation of the world. (Genesis 1:6, 7, 8.) The Greeks translated it by στερεωμα but badly: the Latins imitated them when they used the expression "firmament:" but it is taken for the heavens, and for the whole space between us and heaven, and yet it is above the world. God shows his throne above the expanse of heaven, not without himself, lest the Prophet should conceive anything earthly. For we know how inclined men's minds are to their own fictions. But when God is mentioned, we cannot *conceive* anything aright unless we raise all our senses above the whole world. God, therefore, to raise up the mind of his Prophet, and to show himself at hand that the Prophet may reverently attend to the oracles, and then that he may regard the heavenly glory of God with becoming humility, interposed the expansion between his throne and the earth. It follows —

Ezekiel 10:2

2. And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, *even* lineis, dixit, Vade ²¹⁰ intra in medium rotarum ²¹¹ under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals sub cherub, et imple volas tuas carbonibus ignis of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter ²¹² e medio cherubim, et sparge contra urbem. Et *them* over the city. And he went in in my sight. ingressus est in oculis meis. ²¹³

Now the end of the vision is related, which I just touched upon, since God determined utterly to destroy the city; but this is described by a visible and external symbol. God therefore is said *to have commanded the wan who was clad in linen garments to fill his hands with coals, and to scatter them, on the city*, namely, that he might cause a general burning. Here, indeed, God's name is not expressed, but shortly afterwards the Prophet more clearly relates what he here touches so briefly and so obscurely. It is evident that the person seated on the throne is here spoken of, and we may collect from the context, that this command cannot be referred to any but to God. But we must observe, that the angel commanded to mark the elect now assumes a new character. And hence we collect that the angels were so the ministers of God's favor toward the faithful, that at the same

²¹⁰ Or "enter." — Calvin.

²¹¹ "Of the wheels." — Calvin.

²¹² That is, "lighted coal." — Calvin.

²¹³ "To my eyes." — Calvin.

time, whenever they were commanded, they executed his vengeance; as a steward placed over a large family, not only sustains the office of providing for the family, in supplying it with food and clothing, but in chastising those who conduct themselves sinfully and wickedly. Such, therefore, is the duty of God's angels. When God wishes to brand sinners with double shame, he often delivers them up to the devil as his executioner, and when we are delivered into the devil's hand, this is a sign of extreme vengeance. But God by his angels often exercises judgment against the reprobate, as examples *everywhere* occur; but that is peculiarly remarkable, when the angel slew so many thousands in the army of Sennacherib, that he raised the siege by which the Assyrians oppressed Jerusalem. (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36.) The same thing is now delivered by the Prophet. We saw the angel clad in the linen garments become the protector of the faithful, to preserve them from all injury. But now he is sent to scatter coals through the whole city, to consume the stones and the wood, as well as the men.

These things seem to be contrary to each other, but we show that there is nothing absurd in it, if God imposes a double character on his angels. *He said, therefore, to the man who was clothed, enter within the wheel under the cherub* Here there is a change of number, because the singular number cherub is put for cherubim. But I remarked before that this is usual, and God proposed nothing else than to mark the place where the fiery coals were taken which burnt up the city. The altar was never without fire; for it was not lawful to use any kind of fire, since in this way the sacrifices were contaminated. (Leviticus 6:12, 13.) But that perpetual fire, which God wished to burn upon the altar, regarded reconciliation to himself; for sins were expiated by sacrifices, and therefore the fire on the altar was as it were the people's life. But now God signifies that he had a hidden fire within the wheels, which were near the cherubim, or the four animals. But we have said, and it will be necessary to repeat it again, that *by wheels* all agitations are represented which are discerned under heaven, or revolutions, as they are usually called. But he saw *wheels under the angels*, because when the wind rises, when the sky is covered with clouds and mists, when the rain descends, and the air is disturbed by lightnings, we think, when all these things happen, that such motions and agitations take place naturally. But before this God wished to teach us that great agitations are not blind, but are directed by secret instinct, and *hence* the notion or inspiration of the angels, always exists. Now, therefore, when God orders his angel *to take fire from the midst of the wheel which was under the cherub*, this only means that God has various means of destroying the city. Now the wheels, as we saw before, were carried in different directions, so that they flew throughout the city. Since, therefore, the fire was in the midst of the wheels, while the angels transferred the wheels by their own secret motion, hence we gather that the burning of the city was in the hand of God, and at the same time in the temple. For the Prophet does not now see the wheels near the river Chebar, but in the temple itself; and there is a tacit contrast, as I have reminded you, between the fire by whose incense God was reconciled, and whence also the sacrifices had their odor sweet and pleasing to God, and between this fire, which should be destructive to the whole people. But he says, *the angel had entered*, that we may know, as I have said before, as soon as God has pronounced what he wishes to be done, that the execution of it is at hand. Lastly, the Prophet here commends to us the effect of his command, when he says, *that the angel entered immediately*, as God had commanded. It follows —

Ezekiel 10:3

3. Now the cherubims stood on the right side **3.** Et cherubim stabant ad extra domus cum of the house, when the man went in; and the veniret vir: ²¹⁴ et nubes replevit atrium interius. cloud filled the inner court.

Here the Prophet relates where the cherubim were when the men entered, which looks only to the certainty of the prophecy. For we are not here to seek any cunning speculations why they were on the right hand. It is only intended to show that the way was open to the angel to approach directly to God, and that the cherubim were disposed there to render their assistance; for there ought to be an agreement between the angel who took the fire which he scattered through the whole city, and the cherubim who carried all the angels. Here the Prophet shows this agreement, because the cherubim were turned to the right hand when he entered, so that God was at hand; then also the cherubim were at hand, and thus the wheels bore along the fire.

Now we understand the intention of what we read. *The interior court was filled with a cloud:* doubtless this signifies, that God by all means confirmed the vision, that no suspicion should creep in that the Prophet was deluded with an empty spectra (Exodus 40:34, 35; Numbers 9:15.) This therefore is the reason why God not only appeared on his heavenly throne, but also filled the temple with a cloud; although, as I have said before, this cloud was a symbol of God's alienation, (1 Kings 8:10, 11; Psalm 18:12,) and we know that the sanctuary was filled with a cloud, although God then wished to testify his paternal favor: but in this place and elsewhere, as in Psalm 18, and in other places, a cloud seems to signify the averted face of God, as if the temple was full of darkness. And this afterwards is better confirmed; for he says —

Ezekiel 10:4

4. Then the glory of the LORD went up front **4.** Et elevata fuit gloria Ie-hovae desuper the cherub, *and stood* over the threshold of the cherub ²¹⁵ ad limen domus; ²¹⁶ et impleta fuit house; and the house was filled with the cloud, domus nube: et atrium impletum fuit fulgore and the court was full of the brightness of the gloriae Iehovae. LORD'S glory.

In this verse the Prophet confirms what he lately touched upon, viz., that the temple was filled with blackness, because God had transferred his glory away. He says then, *that the brightness of God's glory appeared above the threshold* But the glory of God resided in the sanctuary and in the very ark of the covenant; but now, when it advances to the threshold, it is just as if he should extinguish the splendor of his glory by which the temple was adorned, and transfer it elsewhere. But he says, *that the glory of Jehovah was elevated from its place:* these words signify change of

²¹⁴ That is, "while he was entering." — Calvin.

²¹⁵ That is, "which was above the cherub." — Calvin.

²¹⁶ "Above the threshold of the temple." — Calvin.

place: God is everywhere said to dwell between the cherubim, and he wished to *be* called upon there; but now his glory is said to be removed elsewhere. Hence, therefore, it appears, that the temple was deprived of God's presence, and was in some sense stripped of its furniture; for without God what remained? Hence that darkness which was formerly mentioned, and is again repeated. The glory of Jehovah then was withdrawn: from whence? from its own place and station, where it dwelt between the cherubim, and came to the threshold of the temple: then he says, all was changed. For the temple in which God's glory formerly shone forth became full of darkness; but the threshold of the house, which was as it were profane, was full of splendor: not that God dwelt at the threshold, for this vision has another meaning, viz., that God after leaving his temple appeared without it; for by the threshold he signifies a place conspicuous to all. Now therefore we understand the design of the Holy Spirit when he says, *the glory of Jehovah was elevated from that seat*, which he had chosen as a *residence* for himself between the cherubim, *and was conspicuous above the threshold*: whence it happened that the temple itself grew dark, but God's brightness was conspicuous in the court itself. It follows —

Ezekiel 10:5

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| <p>5. And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard <i>even</i> to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh.</p> | <p>5. Et vox alarum cherubim audita fuit usque ad exterius atrium, sicuti vox Dei omnipotentis cum loquitur.</p> |
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In this verse also the Prophet confirms the vision, because God always gave signs of his presence. But it seems also to have another object, since the cherubim by the sound of their wings point out a remarkable change, both unusual and incomprehensible. For he says, *there was a noise which shook the place, just as if God was speaking*. When therefore we hear God's voice, the Prophet means to say, it is just as if God thundered from heaven and made the whole world tremble; for no concussion can be more severe than that sound of the cherubims' wings. From this a certain wonderful change must be perceptible, since God so filled his Prophet with terror, that he should be a messenger and witness of it to all others.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou now placest before our eyes proofs of thine anger, that we may not perversely provoke thy wrath, like thine ancient people; but rather, may we so profit by this teaching as to grow wise in time, and strive to be reconciled to thee, and to cast away all our depraved desires, until at length we shall be gathered unto that blessed rest which thine only-begotten Son has procured for us by his blood. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY SIXTH.

Ezekiel 10:6-7

6. And it came to pass, *that* when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, indutus erat lineis, dicendo, Sume ignem e medio Take fire from between the wheels, from between rotae, e medio cherubim; profectus est, et stetit the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside e regione rotae. the wheels.

7. And *one* cherub stretched forth his hand 7. Et extendit cherub manure suam e medio from between the cherubims unto the fire that cherubim ad ignem qui erat in medio cherubim: *was* between the cherubims, and took *thereof*, et recepit, et dedit in volas ²¹⁷ ejus qui indutus and put *it* into the hands of *him that was* clothed erat lineis: et accepit, et egressus est. with linen: who took *it*, and went out.

Here the Prophet teaches the end of the vision. The Jews thought that they should always be safe and secure under God's *presence*; they thought that the sacred fire on the altar availed for the expiation of all wickedness. But God showed that he so resided in the temple that he clothed himself with wrath against them, and that the cherubim were keepers of his arms by which they were at length to be destroyed. We see, therefore, that this false and perverse glowing by which the Jews were intoxicated was cut from under them, since they thought that God was in some way bound to themselves exclusively. Hence the angel is ordered to take fire and to sprinkle it about the city, that it may be destroyed by the burning. But this was necessary, because the Jews, while they for a long time obstinately abused the forbearance of God, could not be induced to repent by any fear of his wrath. For this reason this vision was shown to the Prophet. Then he says that fire was given, but whence was it taken? *it was*, says he, *in the midst of the cherubim*. When David prays to God, he makes mention of the cherubim, (Psalm 80:1,) by which a more familiar access is laid open, and deservedly so; because God, when inviting the faithful to himself, as if he stretched forth his hands to them, had angels at hand who brought him in contact with men. Now the Prophet teaches, that God's presence was of no use to the Jews, because he was in arms for their destruction; and the cherubim, who were formerly ministers of his grace, were now at hand to execute his vengeance, since they extend fire from hand to hand for the conflagration of the whole city. For he says, *that he was come who was clad in linen garments, and stood near the wheels*, by which words he signifies, that angels were thoroughly prepared to obey God's commands in every particular. In men there is great delay and even languor; but the Prophet assures us, that angels were ready for the performance of their duty. As soon as God shows them what he wishes to be done, they have their hands extended, and thus they are prepared to execute his will. For this reason he says, *that they stood near the wheels* It follows —

Ezekiel 10:8

²¹⁷ "Into his hands." — Calvin.

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| 8. And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings. | 8. Et visa est ipsis cherubim similitudo manus hominis sub alis |
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I will now pass rapidly over what I explained more copiously in the first chapter, lest I should burden you with vain repetition. I said *that hands appeared under the wings*, that the Prophet might understand the great vigor of angels for action: but in the meantime it marked the agreement of their agitation with the obedience which they offer to God. For doubtless wings in angels represent direction, by which God testifies that the angels have no proper or independent, motion, but are governed by his secret instinct: for wings signify something terrestrial and human. And it is clear that when wings were given to angels, by this symbol God's secret government was pointed out, (Colossians 1:16,) for they are not only called principalities, but powers. Since, therefore, God governs angels by his own will, he therefore wishes them to be represented in the sanctuary as winged. (Exodus 25:20, and Exodus 37:9.) Now, because there is no action without hands, the Prophet says that *human hands appeared under the wings*: as if he had said, that this alacrity was not without its effect, because it was joined with operation, for we know that all functions are designated by this word in Scripture. It is then as if he said, that the angels were winged, since they were animated by the secret virtue of God, and had no motion in themselves; then that they were apt and fit for exercising the functions committed to them, because they were endued with hands. But he says that *those hands lay hid under their wings*, because angels do not take up anything rashly, as men take up a matter vigorously, but without choice. He says, then, that *their hands were covered by the wings*, because angels undertake nothing rashly nor without consideration, but every operation of theirs depends on that secret government of God of which I have spoken. It follows

Ezekiel 10:9

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| 9. And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. | 9. Et aspexi, et ecce quatuor rotae e regione cherubim, rota una e regione cherub unius, altera e regione alterius cherub: et aspectus rotarum tanquam similitudo lapidis Tharsis. |
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Here the Prophet, as in the first chapter, says that wheels were added to each living creature. I have previously explained what the wheels mean. I will now only allude to them; concerning the living creatures I shall by and bye treat more fully. But the wheels are images of all the changes which are discerned in the world. No more suitable figure can be chosen; for nothing is stationary in the world, but revolutions, as we commonly call them, are continually happening. Since, therefore, they are so changeable, nay even tumultuous at times, profane men cannot understand how the world is governed by the fixed counsel of God; but they fabricate for themselves a blind fortune: hence God in concession to our weakness has represented to us, under the form of wheels, all changes of things, all accidents, as they are called, and all events; as if he were to say, that all things

in the world are revolving and changing, not only that all elements are agitated upwards and downwards, but human events especially. Meanwhile he has corrected the error, while he has conceded something to the rudeness of men. For we see manifold conversions which appear to us under the form of a wheel: but meanwhile we indulge in too much license, when we imagine a blind fortune. Hence the Prophet *saw wheels near the cherubim*; that is, he saw those changes by which men's minds are disturbed, as if all things happened rashly in the world. But he saw that the wheels did not revolve by their own force, but are annexed to the angels, since all events depend on a first cause, namely, on that secret ordinance and inspiration of God, by which the angels are moved, and whence also they have their vigor. In this explanation nothing is forced, because it is not doubtful that the living creatures, as we shall soon see, signify angels. Let us go on then to the context —

Ezekiel 10:10

10. And *as for* their appearances, they four **10.** Et aspectus eorum similitudo una,²¹⁸ ipsis
had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. quatuor, quemadmodum si rota esset in medio
rotae.

We have also explained this part. He says *that all had the same aspect*, not because God always governs events in an equable manner, for experience opposes this. But he means that the appearance was the same, because the variety which causes darkness to our eyes, does not remove the perpetual and well-arranged tenor of the works of God. Hence *there is one appearance to the four wheels*, because all God's works agree among themselves; and although their wonderful variety draws our eyes this way and that, yet he knows how to direct to his own purposes things which appear so dissipated. There is again a kind of concession, when he says, *that wheel was in the midst of wheel*. For we see things so mutually involved, that no distinction occurs to us when we consider God's works by our own carnal sense. If we wish, therefore, to judge concerning God's works, *wheel will be in the midst of wheel*; that is, there will be wonderful perplexity, and this will hold us so bound together, that our minds cannot extricate themselves. This, therefore, is the concession, that. *wheel was in the midst of wheel*; but the common error is corrected directly afterwards, when the Prophet adds that *the wheels were full of eyes*. It follows then —

Ezekiel 10:11-12

11. When they went, they went upon their **11.** Cum proficiscentur, ad quatuor latera
four sides; they turned not as they went, but to pergebant, non revertebantur in eundo²¹⁹ quia ad
locum ad quem respiciebat caput post illud
ambulabant, non revertebantur eundo.

²¹⁸ That is, "the appearance of each was the same." — Calvin.

²¹⁹ "Going forward." — Calvin

the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went.

12. And their whole body, and their backs, **12.** Et tota caro ipsorum, et dorsa ipsorum, et
and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, manus ipsorum, et alae ipsorum, denique rotae
were full of eyes round about, *even* the wheels ipsae plenae erant oculis in circuitu ipsis quatuor
that they four had. rotis.

Now, as I have remarked, after the Prophet has granted that there are certain events of things as it were twisted and bending, and that God acts through windings, he then shows that God does nothing rashly: and that the events which we think tumultuous and confused have a certain direction, and that too the best. For this reason he says, first that the *wheels had set out, they did not return, since each followed its own head* Interpreters do not agree on these words. For as to the turning of the head, some translate it “the first,” and thus mean that in whatever way the first cherub goes, the others follow him. But I rather think that the wheels are compared with the cherubs themselves, and the singular noun head is here put for heads: for we before saw that wheels were annexed to each cherub, Therefore each wheel has its own head, that is, has a living creature by which it is ruled. Hence the sense of the Prophet is, that the ‘wheels turned on this side or on that, by any outward or sudden impulse, but were governed by the cherubim themselves, which will explain this portion more clearly.

He adds, *that the wheels were full of eyes*. Hence we gather, that although by the events of things God may seem to sport and to have various erratic circuits, yet all things are governed by his inestimable wisdom: for this reason *the wheels are said to be full of eyes* The Prophet uses the word *flesh* inappropriately for the very body of the wheels. But we know that the language which he used in exile was not very elegant, and hence it is by no means wonderful if it is rather rough and savors of asperity. Yet the sense is not doubtful, since *the whole body of the wheels in their back and their hands* was all full of eyes: he next adds, *the wheels themselves*, not to mark anything different, but afterwards when he speaks of the flesh, the back and the hands, he names the wheels simply: as if he had said that they were full of eyes in every part. Now we see how things contrary in appearance may be best reconciled. For the events of things are as unstable as if any one kept turning a wheel: then they become complicated, as if wheel was within wheel: but in the meantime God so tempers all things among themselves which seem to us confused, that it may appear that he perceives best what is necessary to be done, and that the events of things are full of eyes. But whence does this arise? This clearness depends on the angelic inspiration, for the wheels are not turned in different directions of their own accord, but each follows its own leader and head. It is also said, *in appearance like the stone Tharsis, (beryl.)* Jerome thought the Cilician sea was intended, and so translated it sky-colored: but because we know that this name beryl occurs among the precious stones, I therefore retain the simple sense. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 10:13

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| 13. As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. | 13. Ad rotas ipsas clamavit, rota in auribus reels. |
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By this verse the Prophet better confirms what I have said, that the events of things are full of eyes, since they depend on the secret commands of God. Because therefore nothing happens unless by God's command, hence it happens in the multiform changes of things that there is an equable tenor with reference to God. He says therefore that *God cried*, or the angel, *O wheel*. We know that wheels are properly without sense: but here the Prophet signifies that God's voice is heard by all creatures, so that not even the slightest motion happens without that secret instinct. When the air is serene and calm, we do not think that God's voice reigns there, but we imagine some natural cause: so also when the sky is clouded, when it rains, when storms rise, when other changes happen, in some way or other we exclude God from these actions. But the Prophet, on the contrary, says, *that he heard the voice of God when he cried O wheel* ²²⁰ But God did not exclaim by way of derision, but wished to testify that there was a certain hidden inclination by which all creatures obey his command To this end therefore God exclaims, O wheel, that we should not think that events are rashly moved, or that any agitation arises without control, or that the elements are so gross that they do not obey God, since his voice gives efficacy and vigor to all.

Ezekiel 10:14

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| 14. And every one had four faces: the first face <i>was</i> the face of a cherub, and the second face <i>was</i> the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. | 14. Et quatuor facies uni, singulis animalibus, facies unius facies cherub, et facies secundi facies hominis, et tertii facies leonis, et quarti facies aquilae. |
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Now Ezekiel descends to the animals themselves, which he now pronounces to be cherubim, yet under another form than that in the sanctuary. We said in the first chapter why he saw four cherubim since only two surrounded the ark of the covenant. This variation may seem absurd, for God was accustomed to accommodate his visions to the forms of the law, that he might hold the people in the simplicity of the law. But the reason which I brought forward in the first chapter is by no means to be rejected, because in truth so great was the grossness and rudeness of the people, that it was necessary to bend aside from the first and genuine institution. God had been content with two cherubim, and in that number doubtless he represented all angels; but he was surrounded on the right hand and on the left that he might show the people that he could never be wanting in power to bring them help. Now the Jews were so stupified that they shut up God in heaven, because scarcely any recognition of his providence then remained, as we have already seen. Since, therefore, the Jews thus excluded God from the government of the world, he was obliged to use a new form, different from that of the law, that they might really perceive that God's government extended over

²²⁰ Compare *Milton* here: —

*“Wheel within wheel indrawn,
Itself instinct with spirit.” — Par. Lost, 6:751.*

the four quarters of the world. And there is no doubt that by the four living creatures God reminded them that nothing took place in the world without his control. But when the world is described, its four quarters or regions are put.

Now, therefore, we understand why the Prophet saw not two cherubim only but four: the same reason for difference in the form of the cherubim is also added. For the cherubim were like winged boys: but the Prophet says, that each of the living creatures was furnished with four heads. This was doubtless an assistance towards rousing the people from their torpor, because the Jews could not otherwise understand the meaning and the force of the angelic inspiration by which God governs the whole world: hence after four living creatures had been presented before the Prophet, four heads were also given to each living creature, namely, *the head of an ox, of a man, of a lion, and of an eagle*. We said in the first chapter, that by these heads all living creatures were represented to us: for although trees, and the sea, and rivers, and herbs, and the air, and stars, and sun, are parts of the universe, yet in living beings there is some nearer approach to God, and some clearer display of his energy: for there is motion in a man, in an ox, in an eagle, and in a lion. These animals *comprehend* within themselves all parts of the universe by that figure of speech by which a part represents the whole. Meanwhile since angels are living creatures we must observe in what sense God attributes to angels themselves the head of a lion, an eagle, and a man: for this seems but little in accordance with their nature. But he could not better express the inseparable connection which exists in the motion of angels and all creatures. We have said, that angels are not called the powers²²¹ of God in vain: now when a lion either roars or exercises its strength, it seems to move by its own strength, so also it may be said of other animals. But God here says, that the living creatures are in some sense parts of the angels though not of the same substance, for this is not to be understood of similarity of nature but. of effect. We are to understand, therefore, that while men move about and discharge their duties, they apply themselves in different directions to the objects of their pursuit, and so also do wild beasts; yet there are angelic motions underneath, so that neither men nor animals move themselves, but their whole vigor depends on a secret inspiration.

A difficult question remains, namely, why Ezekiel says here that the first head was that of a cherub, while in the first chapter he said it was that of an ox. (Ezekiel 10:10.) Some escape the difficulty by saying that it appeared at a distance like an ox, but a nearer inspection showed it to be a cherub. But this is too forced, so that I have no doubt that there is some difference in the vision; nor does what he afterwards adds, that this was the living creature which he saw at the river Chebar, oppose this; for he calls anything which is like another, and has the same object, the same thing. Paul says their fathers in the desert ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink. (1 Corinthians 10:3, 4.) But we know how different was the symbol manna, and the water flowing from the rock, from the sacred Supper which Christ left for us; but as I have already said, since there is an affinity between the sacred symbols, they are to be referred to the same scope. Thus Paul says, the same drink and the same food, and Ezekiel says, *it was the same living creature*. Meanwhile, there is nothing out of place in our saying that the vision is slightly changed, For when God opened himself at first, the Prophet was on profane ground, now the vision is added more in the form of the sanctuary, because he was seized by the Spirit, that he might see the abominations by which the Jews had stained the temple, as already stated. When therefore the face of an ox was

²²¹ “*Virtutes*.” — Lat. “*Vertus* de Dieu.” — *Fr.* An important word, lint not very easily translatable by a single English word. — *Tr.*

presented to the Prophet, near the river Chebar, that he might now understand that they were angels, or living' cherubs, and that the four heads may not distract him, the face of a cherub is presented to him; so that, being admonished by this sign, he may determine that each living creature is nothing else than an angel or cherub, although it differs from the received form, of which God had proposed to Moses an example on the mount.

We now understand why God turned aside from the course prescribed in his law, when he offered this vision to his Prophet; because, in truth, the people had so degenerated from all sense of piety, that they could not be taught by the simple plan or rule of the law, but had need of gross remembrancers. This is one explanation. Then again four living creatures are employed, that God may signify that his energy is diffused through the whole universe. Then, again, four heads are assigned to each living creature, that we may know that no part of the world is free from his providence, and from that secret inspiration which is *efficacious* through angels. Then as to the last clause, where the face of an ox appeared to the Prophet before, now he beholds that of a cherub, that he may understand that these living creatures are nothing else than angels; but the reason why God endues his angels with a new form, is because the slothfulness of the people was so great, that they did not recognize what they ought to have been familiar with, for it was not God's fault that they had not imbibed the doctrine of piety from their earliest childhood. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 10:15

15. And the cherubims were lifted up. This **15.** Et ascenderunt cherubim: ipsum est *is the living creature that I saw by the river of animal quod videram in fluvio Chebar.*
Chebar.

We shall afterwards explain in the proper place why he says *the cherubim ascended*. The first and principal scope of this vision was that God would no longer dwell in the temple, because he had determined to depart thence on account of the impious and wicked profanations by which the temple had been contaminated. Now for this reason he says, *the cherubim ascended*; but he adds, *that was the living creature, which he had seen near the river Chebar* He adds this for clearing up the vision, because if it had been offered only once, the Jews might doubt its tendency, and its obscurity would take away their taste for it, and render the prophetic teaching quite insipid. But since the vision is repeated, God confirms and sanctions what otherwise had not been sufficiently stamped upon the hearts of the people; for experience also teaches us this, that we increase in faith and make further progress according as God speaks with us again and again. For even if we seem to ourselves to follow up what we have learnt from the Scriptures, yet if the same sentence is repeated, we become still more familiar with it. Then again, if we read the same sentiment in two or three Prophets, God brings forward more witnesses, that so the truth may be better established; since we know our great propensity to doubt, we are always fluctuating, and although the word of God has in it sufficient energy to confirm us, we are still unsettled, unless our minds are propped up by various supports. God therefore wished to place the same thing twice before the eyes of his Prophet, that the former vision might make more impression not only on the Prophet himself, but

also upon all the Jews. For we said that although there was some difference, yet there is no discordance in the Prophet's saying that the living creature was one and the same.

Ezekiel 10:16

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| <p>16. And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them.</p> | <p>16. Et cum proficiscebantur cherubim proficiscebantur rotae e regione ipsorum: ²²² et cum attollerent cherubim alas suas in sublime e terra, non revertabantur rotae, etiam ipsae e regione ipsorum.</p> |
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The Prophet here confirms what he had said before, namely, that there was no intrinsic motion in the wheels, but that they were drawn by a secret instinct wherever the cherubim moved themselves. Hence we gather that the events of things are not accidental, nor excited in various directions by *any* blind impulse, but directed by the hidden energy of God, and that too by means of angels. First he says, *when the cherubim set out, the wheels set out at the same time*: then *when the cherubim raised their wings upwards, the wheels followed the same course, and did not return*; that is, were not drawn aside from that agreement of which he had spoken before; but how the wheels were not reversed, we shall explain more clearly to-morrow.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since we are the work and fashioning of thy hands, that we may know that we exist and move in thee alone, so that we may submit ourselves to thee, and not only may we be ruled by thy hidden providence, but may it so appear that we are obedient and submissive to thee, as becometh sons, that we may desire to glorify thy name in the world, until we arrive at the fruition of that blessed inheritance which is laid up for us in heaven, through Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY SEVENTH.

We began yesterday to explain the sentence of the Prophet when he says, *that the wheels were raised together with the living creatures*. But we have shortly taught that whatever we behold in creation so depends on angelic motion and inspiration, that there is an inseparable connection between them. Now the Prophet adds, that *the wheels were not reversed*, by which phrase he expresses their continual tenor. For it cannot happen that any agreement should appear for a time without a sudden change occurring. But the Prophet says that the wheels were so raised with the living creatures that they never departed from them. Now we understand his intention. He had

²²² Or, "near them." — Calvin.

previously asserted the same thing of the living creatures, and there was a kind of contradiction to be solved which might otherwise occasion a scruple, for he said that the living creatures were reversed and yet not reversed, but we can reconcile these two things, because the living *creatures* never deviated from their prescribed course and from a definite and settled space; meanwhile they were reversed, because they ran like lightning and hastened quickly from one action to another. Meanwhile the Prophet wished to teach, that in God's works nothing is abrupt, nothing cut off, nothing mutilated, but angels so direct all actions and all events of things, that whatever God determines arrives at its own end. But this does not prevent God from operating variously, and after at one goal from beginning a new course. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 10:17

17. When they stood, *these* stood; and when they were lifted up, *these* lifted up themselves **17.** Et cum starent animilia stabant etiam: et cum elevaren-tur elevebant se: quia spiritus *also:* for the spirit of the living creature *was* in animalis in ipsis. them.

As he just said that the wheels were obedient to the movement of the living creatures, so he now says that they ceased with them. But in this place it seems as if some incongruity might arise: for it is not correct to say that angels ever rest. We know that their quickness and promptness in executing God's commands is celebrated. (Psalm 103:20, 21.) Then since angels are the powers of God, it follows that they never cease from their office of working. For God never can rest; he sustains the world by his energy, he governs everything however minute, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his decree. (Matthew 10:29.) And there is that known and celebrated sentence of Christ, My Father and I work hitherto. (John 5:17.) Since, therefore, God never rests from his works, how then can that resting be explained of which the Prophet says, *when the angels stood, the wheels also stood*? I reply: it must be taken in a human sense; for although God works continually by means of angels, yet he seems sometimes to rest between. For he does not govern his works in any equable manner, as for instance, the heavens are sometimes calm, and at others agitated, so that a great variety appears in *God's* works, from which we may imagine that he is sometimes in vehement motion, and at others at perfect repose. This, therefore, is the cessation of which the Prophet now speaks when he says, *the living creatures* stood, and at the *same time the wheels with them* Experience also confirms this; for God sometimes seems to mingle heaven and earth, and rouses us by unaccustomed work, while at others the course of his works seems to flow like a placid river. So that it is not absurd to say that *the wheels stood with the living creatures*, and *proceeded and were elevated with them* He adds, *the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels*, I explained this point, in the first chapter, but here it may be shortly explained, that the spirit is here taken for secret vigor or instinct. The wheels are not properly animated, because we said that the events of things are represented to us by this word, and whatever seems to happen in the world; but their incomprehensible vigor and agitation proceeds from God's command, so that all creatures are animated by angelic motion: not that there is a conversion of the angel into an ox or a man, but

because God exerts and diffuses his energy in a secret manner, so that no creature is content with his own peculiar vigor, but is animated by angels themselves. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 10:18-19

18. Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. **18.** Et egressa est gloria Iehovae e limine domus, et stetit super cherubim:

19. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also *were* beside them, and *every one* stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD'S house; and the glory of the God of Israel *was* over them above. **19.** Et sustulerunt cherubim alas suas, et ascenderunt e terra in oculis meis: cum egredierentur rotae etiam coram ipsis: et stetit super limen portae Iehovae orientalis: et gloria Dei Israel super ipsa sursum.

Here the Prophet teaches us what is the principal point in the vision, namely, that God had deserted the temple: for we, know with what confidence the Jews boasted that they should be safe continually under the protection of God. In consequence of the promise, that God's temple should be the place of his rest wherein he would dwell, (Psalm 132:14,) they did not think it possible that God would ever leave them: so they sinned without restraint; and while they drove him far away from them by their crimes, yet they wished to have him in some way bound to them. This folly is derided by Isaiah — Heaven is my seat, and earth is my foot. stool: what house therefore will ye build for me? (Isaiah 66:1.) God had commanded his temple to be built, and wished to have his earthly dwelling, place there: but he says that his wish had been rendered nugatory: and how? why when he promised that he would dwell in the temple, he wished his name to be purely and reverently invoked there.

But the Jews had polluted the temple in every way. Hence they thought that God was shut up there in vain: because his liberality did not tend to his partaking of the captivity of the Jews, but to his having them in obedience to himself. Therefore Isaiah deservedly says, that the temple became unfit for the use of God when it was profaned. So also we see in Jeremiah: Do not trust in lying words, the temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah. (Jeremiah 7:4.) That repetition is used because they were so elated by their obstinacy. The Jews resisted the Prophets, and as often as any threat was uttered against them, they immediately fled to that asylum, the temple of the Lord.

For this reason therefore the Prophet now relates, *that the glory of God had deserted the sanctuary*: for otherwise what we have seen would have been out of place: he was sent to scatter burning through the whole city: in this way the temple would have been burnt, and God would have been consumed by peculiar fire: here I speak after the common form, because when the ark of the covenant is called the God of hosts, (2 Samuel 6:2,) how could it happen that the fire should destroy the ark, together with all parts of the temple? But God himself meets them and shows them that the temple was deprived of its glory when it was destroyed by the enemy. Afterwards the temple was overthrown And in the Psalms its lamentable ruin is described, how cruelly and proudly, and

with what barbarous mockery the enemy insulted it, (Psalm 74, and Psalm 79:) this was very disgraceful, and disturbed their weak minds. Hence it was necessary to persuade the faithful that God no longer dwelt in the temple, but that it remained only an empty spectacle, because he had taken away his glory since the place was corrupted by so many defilements. Now therefore we understand the design of the Prophet, when he says *that the glory of Jehovah had departed from the threshold of the house, and stood above the cherubim* But he had already said that the cherubim had raised their wings, which he again confirms. Whence it follows, that God with his angels, when the temple was left, deserted the Jews, so that for the future they would boast themselves in vain to be safe under his protection. Therefore he says *that the cherubim raised their wings, and ascended from the earth before his eyes* Nor is this clause superfluous, since it was difficult to persuade the Jews of what he said about his deserting them. There was a celebrated oracle, “here will I dwell, since I have chosen it.” (Psalm 132:14.) When they grasped at that, they thought that the sun would sooner fall from heaven than God would leave that temple.

But the Prophet says *that he saw it clearly*, that no doubt might remain. If any one should here ask, how that promise which I have mentioned agrees with that departure which the Prophet here relates? the answer is easy, if we only understand that God does not always work by human means, nor yet according to our carnal perception. God often seems to act so abruptly that his beginning is without an end: in fine, God seems sometimes to sport and to draw back his hand, so that the event does not answer to the joyful beginnings. Since therefore, according to our carnal senses, God’s works appear to be frustrated, it is necessary to use such language: otherwise we should never understand how God departed from the sanctuary, when he had chosen it in perpetuity. But he so departed, that the place still remained sacred, and the temple stood before God though it had been overthrown in the eyes of men. The visible appearance of the temple was taken away, but meanwhile, since the temple was founded on the promise of God, it stood among its ruins, as I have said. For this reason Daniel, although solitude and devastation ought to avert his eyes and senses from Judea, prayed in that direction, as if the temple had remained entire. And why so? He looked at the promise. (Daniel 6:10.) And for this reason the Prophet said, after the return from the captivity, that the glory of the second temple surpassed that of the first, as the Prophet Haggai says. (Haggai 2:9.) And we know with what copiousness and magnificence Isaiah discourses concerning the splendor of the second temple and its inestimable glory. (Isaiah 60:7.) We shall see also a similar doctrine at the end of this book. Since therefore the temple stood before God, because it was founded on his promise, this temporary desertion could not abolish what I have said concerning God’s perpetual station.

same thing also must be said concerning the kingdom: that kingdom ought to stand while the sun and moon shone in heaven, (Psalm 89:37, 38,) this is true: and yet there was a sad interruption during many years. For we know what a serious disgrace the last king suffered: then had all dignity fallen to ruin, so that nothing could be seen but the horrible vengeance of God. And yet that promise always had its own effect; as long as the sun and moon shall stand, they shall be my faithful witnesses of the perpetuity of the kingdom. Now then we understand in what sense God left his temple, and yet did not in anywise break his promise. But he says, *the glory of the God of Israel stood at the eastern gate, but above it, so that it was raised up from the earth*. The meaning of that speech was, that the Jews might know that God was no longer to be sought in that dwelling of wood and stone, because he had not only left his seat, but had ascended upwards, that they should have no more intercourse with him. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 10:20

20. This *is* the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I Deum Israel in fluvio Chebar: et cognovi quod knew that they *were* the cherubims. **20.** Ipsum est animal quod vide-ram subtus cherubim esscut.

He repeats what we have seen before, namely, that one vision was offered twice, because God wished to mark distinctly what otherwise had been doubtful. The Prophet indeed was sufficiently persuaded that God had appeared to him, but the confirmation of it was not in vain, because he would have to sustain great conflicts. Meanwhile it must be observed, that the vision was confirmed a second time, not for the private advantage of a single person, but that this drawing attention to it might profit the whole people, or at any rate render those without excuse who so despised the favor of God, so manifest and so clearly laid open to them. He says, therefore, *this was the living creature which he had seen under the God of Israel* In the first chapter he related that there was a throne in the open firmament of heaven, where he sat who was like a man in external form, and yet was not a man. There we saw that the true and only God was alluded to, and yet that this description could not apply to the Father, but necessarily belonged to the Son. These two things then are to be borne in mind: and the Prophet here takes away all doubt when he names *the God of Israel like a man*, which could not apply to the person of the Father. That likeness then ought, to be agreed upon among the pious. Controversy, therefore, on this point ought not be engaged in; for Sabellius, who took away the distinction of persons, was sufficiently refuted by his own extravagance. Since, therefore, the Father never put on the form or likeness of man, and it is nowhere read in the Scriptures that he is compared to a man, we must explain this of Christ. And now Ezekiel bears witness *that he is the God of Israel*. We see, therefore, how foolishly the triflers of our day babble who desire to disturb the Churches by making Christ a sort of deity transfused from the substance of the Father. They confess, indeed, that he is God, but this confession is a mere pretense,²²³ since they say that the God of Israel means God the Father, and that the title cannot apply to either the Son or the Spirit. The Spirit, therefore, is mistaken when he says by the Prophet's mouth, *the God of Israel appeared in human form* This place, therefore, is remarkable for refuting that delusion by which foolish men fatigue themselves and others: while they allow Christ to be God, yet they deprive him of his true deity, because they say that it is derived from the Father.

He says also, *that he knew them to be cherubim* Now although he knew that God had appeared to him before, yet he had no certain knowledge concerning the living creatures, for with regard to them he remained in suspense; but now after God has familiarly explained to him the vision in the temple, he says, *that he was taught that they were cherubim* So what we said yesterday is confirmed, that the face of the ox was changed into that of a cherub, so that the Prophet understood that angels were pointed out under the form of cherubim, even those which surrounded the ark of the covenant. Let us proceed —

²²³ The Latin is, "*merus est fucus*:" the French, "*mats ce n'est que toute tromperie*:" *Anglice*, "all trash." — *Tr.*

Ezekiel 10:21

21. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man *was* under their wings. **21.** Quatuor quatuor: ²²⁴ facies uni, et quatuor alae uni: et similitudo manuum hominis sub alis ipsorum.

The Prophet appears to dwell on points by no means doubtful: he has already spoken of the four heads, then why does he repeat it? Because he was dealing with a dull and perverse people: they were also slow in receiving the Prophet's doctrine: and they added this vice worse than all the rest, namely, a constant and open endeavor to detract from the authority of all the Prophets. For this reason the Prophet says, that there were *four heads and four wings to each living creature*, lest the Jews should scoffingly deride it as an empty specter and delusion of the Prophet, because he thought he saw what had no existence. For this reason he inculcates more frequently what was sufficiently clear by itself had the Jews been docile and obedient. It follows —

Ezekiel 10:22

22. And the likeness of their faces *was* the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward. **22.** Et similitudo facierum ipsis, facies quam videram super fluvium Chebar, aspectus eorum et ipsa ²²⁵ quisque ²²⁶ ad ²²⁷ faciem suam proficiscebatur.

He pursues the same sentiment, that nothing was obscure or perplexed in this vision, since all things were mutually suitable. For the remembrance of the vision which he had received remained in the Prophet's mind: but now when he is hurried into the temple, he recognizes the same God and the same forms as those to which he had been accustomed. We see then how he meets their perverseness, who had otherwise boasted that he had offered them only his own fictions without any truth in them. Hence he restrains this petulance, and shows that God had certainly appeared to him, and that too a second time. Since he now says *that each living creature went, forward in the direction of its face*, it is not doubtful that this refers to their actions. Hence he points out that angels did not wander in their course as a person usually does who looks this way and that, or deserts the path, or turns to the right hand or the left. The Prophet therefore says, that the living creatures proceeded so that each was intent on its own end or scope: because if the motion of the angels had been turbulent, they had not been the servants of God. Finally, the Prophet signifies that the angels were not only alert and prepared for obedience, but were at the same time arranged and formed

²²⁴ This is, "four apiece." — Calvin.

²²⁵ "The living creatures or cherubs themselves." — Calvin.

²²⁶ "Cherub." — Calvin

²²⁷ "Towards." — Calvin.

after a fixed rule, so that they did not in the slightest degree turn aside from. the command and direction of God ²²⁸ It now follows —

²²⁸ The explanation which Calvin gives of the meaning of these singular Disclosures is indeed very adverse to our modern ideas of those physical laws by which the Almighty governs the universe; and they will not perhaps be easily adopted by those who have been inspired with the philosophy of Bacon and Newton. The reader of Calvin may with satisfaction consult C. B. Michaelis' *Sylloge Comment. Theol.*, edited by D. T. Pott, volume 5, and following; Lightfoot's *Description of the Temple*, volume 1; and Jahn's *Bibl. Archaeolog.*, volume 2, sec. 187, and following.

The learned *Commentary on Ezekiel and Explanations of his Visions*, by Hieron. Pradus and Joan. Bapt. Villalpandus, two Jesuits, published at Rome in 1596 and 1604, by the permission of their superiors, illustrates this tenth chapter very copiously, and displays great diligence, erudition, and accuracy. Another valuable exegetical exposition of this chapter is given by OEcolampadius in his *Comment. in omn. libr. Prophet.*, edit. 1558; he occupies eighteen folio pages with an elaborate comment under the title "*Expositio mysterii quod hac visione adumbratur*," in which he sees *Christus dominus glorie* and *gratia est firmamentum justitiae Christi*. The discussion of the Cherubim is very complete, though it may be well to consult the article in Kitto's *Biblical Cyclopedia* on the word "Cherub." Rosenmuller, in his valuable *Scholia*, makes constant use of the Arable and Syriac versions, quotes fully from the Greek. of Theodoret, and diligently compares the Hebrew Codices of Kennicott and De Rossi, as well as the Greek texts of the Roman Codex, the Complutensian, and the Alexandrine. With such *adminicula* the reader of these Lectures on Ezekiel will have sufficient *data* for forming a correct judgment on the merits of Calvin's interpretation.

CHAPTER 11

Ezekiel 11:1-2

1. Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the LORD'S house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelathiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.

1. Et sustulit me Spiritus et introduxit me ad portam domus Iehovae orientalera: ²²⁹ et ecce in limine portae vigintiquinque viri: et aspexi in medio ipsorum ²³⁰ Iaaazaniah filium Azur, et Pelathiah filium Benaiah, principes populi.

2. Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city:

2. Et dixit ad me, Fili hominis, isti homines cogitant vanitatem, et consultant consilium perversum in urbe hae.

Here the Prophet admonishes the people that perverse leaders would be the cause of their destruction. For if the blind lead the blind both will fall into the ditch (Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39.) Since, therefore, the elders of the city were such wicked apostates, they drew with them the whole body of the people into the same ruin. Now, therefore, the Prophet shows that the state of the city was so corrupt that no hope of pardon remained, since those who ought to be the eyes of the whole people were involved in darkness. But he names the *five and twenty seniors* Whence it is probable, that this number was chosen in the midst of confusion, or that a definite number is put for an indefinite; and I rather embrace this second view. Whatever it is, it implies that those who held the reins of government were impious despisers of God, and hence it is not surprising that impiety and defection from God and his law had begun to increase among the whole people. But we must remark the Prophet's intention. For common soldiers are accustomed to consider their commanders as a shield, as we this day see in the Papacy. For this is their last refuge, since they think themselves guilty of no fault when they obey their holy Mother Church. Such also formerly was the obstinacy of the people.

Lastly, men always throw off all blame from themselves, under pretense of error or ignorance. Hence the Prophet now shows that the city was not free from God's wrath, since it was corrupted by its leaders and rulers; nay, that this was a cause of its destruction, since the people were too easily led astray by perverse examples. Meanwhile, we must notice the Prophet's freedom, because he here fearlessly attacks the most noble princes. He was, indeed, out of danger, because he was an exile: but it seems that he was at Jerusalem when he uttered this prophecy. He shows, therefore, his strength of mind, since he does not spare the nobles. Hence this useful doctrine is collected, that those who excel in reputation and rank are not free from blame if they conduct themselves wickedly, as we see happens in the Papacy. For, as to the Pope himself, it is in his power to condemn the whole world, while he exempts himself from all blame. And as to the Bishops, now twenty or thirty witnesses are required, and afterwards even seventy: hence one of those horned beasts could not be convinced, unless the whole people should rise up: so also it was formerly. But here the

²²⁹ "Which looks towards the east." — Calvin.

²³⁰ That is, "between themselves." — Calvin.

Prophet shows, that however eminent are those who are endued with power over the people, yet they are not sacred nor absolved from all law by any peculiar privilege, since God freely judges them by his Spirit, and reprove them by his Prophets. Lastly, if we wish to discharge our duty rightly, especially when it consists of the office of teaching, we should avoid all respect of persons, for those who boast that they excel others are yet subject to the censures of God. For this reason it follows —

Ezekiel 11:3

3. Which say, *It is not near; let us build* 3. Qui dicunt, non in propinquo: aedificare houses: this *city is* the caldron, and we *be* the domos ²³¹ ipsa est olla ²³² nos autem sumus caro. flesh.

Here the Prophet explains what might be obscure through their perverseness. He brings forward, therefore, what the impious thought could be covered by many fallacies. For we know that hypocrites endeavor to fix their eyes on God, and when they scatter their own clouds before themselves, they think that he is blinded. For this reason Isaiah says, that God also is wise, (Isaiah 31:2,) and derides their cunning, since they think that they blind God's eyes whilst they conceal their sins with various coverings. Since, therefore, the obstinacy of these men was so great., the Prophet here strips off their mask; for they could be turned aside by perverse counsels to deny that they deserved anything of the kind. But the Prophet here cuts away their pretenses, because, in truth, their impiety was more than sufficiently evident, since they boast that the time is not yet at hand, and, therefore, that they might build houses at Jerusalem as in a time of ease and peace. As we saw in Jeremiah, the time of the last destruction was approaching; everything remaining in the city had now been destined to final ruin: and for this reason Jeremiah advised houses to be built in Chaldea and in foreign lands, since the captives must spend a long period there, even seventy years. (Jeremiah 29:5.) Since then the predicted time was now drawing on, it became extreme folly in the people to oppose themselves, and to treat God's threats as a laughing-stock, and to boast that it was a time for building. Now, therefore, we see what the Prophet blames and condemns in the five and twenty men who were princes of the people, namely, that they hardened the people in obstinate wickedness, and encouraged torpor, so that the Prophet's threats were unheeded. Since, therefore, they so stupified the people by their enticements, and took away all sense of repentance, they also set aside all fear of God's wrath which had been denounced against them. The Prophet condemns this depravity in their counsels.

But, in the second clause, this contempt appears more detestable when they say, that *Jerusalem is the caldron, and they are the flesh* I do not doubt their allusion to Jeremiah; for in the first chapter the pot was shown, but the fire was from the north, (Jeremiah 1:13;) so then the Spirit wished to teach us, that the Chaldeans would come like a fire to consume Jerusalem, as if a pot is placed on a large and constant fire, even if it be full of water and flesh, yet its contents are consumed, and

²³¹ That is, "Let us build." — Calvin.

²³² Or, "caldron." — Calvin.

the juice of the flesh is dried up by too long cooking. God had demonstrated this by his servant Jeremiah: here the Jews deride and factiously elude what ought to strike them with no light fear, unless they had been too slothful: *behold*, say they, *we are the flesh and Jerusalem is the caldron*: So they seem to rate the Prophet Jeremiah, as if he were inconsistent, — “What? do you threaten us with captivity? and meanwhile you say that this city will be the pot and the Chaldeans the fire. If God wishes to consume us, therefore let us remain within: thus we may build houses.” Now we understand how they sought some appearance of inconsistency in the words of the Prophet: as reprobate and profane men always take up arguments by which they may diminish and extenuate all faith in heavenly doctrine, nay, even reduce it to nothing if they could. The Prophet, therefore, provides a remedy for this evil, as we have seen. But before he proceeds to it, he repeats their impious saying, that *Jerusalem is a caldron, and the people flesh*. They turned what had been said to a meaning directly contrary, for the Prophet said that they should burn since the Chaldeans would be like fire’ but they said — well, we shall be scorched, but that will be done lightly, so that we shall remain safe to a good old age. Hence we understand how diabolical was their audacity, who were so blinded by the just judgments of God, that they did not scruple petulantly to blame even God himself, and to make a laughingstock of the authority of his teaching. Thus we see in another way how faithfully Ezekiel had discharged his duty: he had been created a Prophet: he had not to discharge his office by himself, but was an assistant to Jeremiah. And we cannot otherwise discharge our duty to God and his Church unless we mutually extend our hands to each other, when ministers are mutually united and one studies to assist the other. Ezekiel now signifies this when he professes himself the ally and assistant of Jeremiah.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, that as we know from thine ancient people how great our hardness is, unless we are inclined by thy Holy Spirit, nay, totally renewed into obedience to thy doctrine: that as often as we hear thy threatening, we may be seriously frightened, and that we may desire to return to true and perfect obedience, not by momentary but by permanent repentance, till at length we are gathered into that happy rest, which has been obtained for us through the blood of thine only-begotten Son. Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY EIGHTH.

Ezekiel 11:4

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4. Therefore prophesy against them, | 4. Propterea prophetiza contra eos, |
| prophesy, O son of man. | prophetiza, fili hominis. |

Yesterday we saw that the Jews scurrilously eluded the prophecies of Jeremiah, especially when he threatened them with God's wrath. For he had said, that a vision was offered to him, in which Jerusalem was like a pot, and the fire lighted from the north. For a laughing-stock they said that they could rest safely within the city, because they were not yet cooked but raw, so that if that prophecy is true, said they, we shall not so quickly depart from the city. For God foretold that we should be the flesh which was about to be cooked: if this city is a caldron, we ought to remain here till we are cooked: but this has not happened. Hence what Jeremiah pronounces is vain, that we shall be dragged into exile, because these two things disagree, viz., God wishing us to rest in the city, and yet dragging us into a distant region. Since it is so, Jeremiah's prophecy is vain; thus then they deceived themselves. But God commands another Prophet of his to rise up against them. And the repetition is emphatic, *prophecy, prophecy against them* For nothing is less tolerable than that men should petulantly spurn God's anger, which ought to inspire all with fear. For if the mountains melt before him, (Isaiah 64:3,) if angels themselves tremble, (Job 4:18,) how comes it that the vessel of clay dares to conflict with its maker? (Isaiah 45:9.) And we see also how God grows angry against such perverseness; especially when he denounces, by the mouth of Isaiah, that this sin would be unpardonable. I have called you, said he, to ashes and mourning: but, on the other hand, ye have said, Let us eat and drink, and ye have turned my threats into a laughing-stock. For this was your proverb, to-morrow we shall die: as I live, your iniquity shall not go unpunished. God affirms by an oath, that he would never be appeased by the impious and profane despisers of his judgments. For this reason also he now repeats again, *prophecy, prophecy*. Let us go on —

Ezekiel 11:5

5. And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, **5.** Et cecidit super me Spiritus Iehovae, et and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the LORD; dixit mihi, Die, sic dicit Iehovah, sic dixisti Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know domus Israel: et ascensiones spiritus vestri ego the things that come into your mind, *every one* novi ipsam.²³³ of them.

Here the Prophet turns the impious scurrility of the people into another sense, for they had corrupted what Jeremiah had said. They knew what he meant by the pot and the flesh, but they thought they could avert God's wrath by their cleverness. Here the Prophet brings forward another sense, not that of Jeremiah, nor that of the people, but a third. In the twenty-fourth chapter he will again denounce them as like flesh, since God will cast them into a pot to be cooked, so that even their bones should be consumed. But here the Prophet only considers how he shall refute their wicked saying, by which they think to catch Jeremiah in a snare, as they did not agree sufficiently with his prophecy. What does he say, then? First, *that the Spirit had fallen upon, him*, that he might gain a hearing for his prophecy; for if he had spoken from his own mind he might be rejected with impunity; for the speakers ought to utter God's word, and to be the organ of his Spirit. The Pope boasts this to his followers, but the true and faithful servants of God ought to do this in reality,

²³³ There is a change of number. — Calvin.

namely, not to utter their own comments, but to receive from God's hands what they deliver to the people, and thus to discharge their duty faithfully. To this end the Prophet says, that *the Spirit fell upon him*. For although he had been previously endued with the gift of prophecy, yet as often as he exercised it this grace ought, to be renewed; because it is not sufficient for us to be imbued once with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, unless God works in us daily. Since, therefore, he follows up his gifts in his servants while he uses their assistance, hence it is not in vain that Ezekiel says, *the Spirit was still given to him*, because this gift was necessary for every act. Afterward she expresses more dearly what he had said, namely, *that the Spirit had spoken*; for it signifies that what he shortly subjoins had been dictated to him.

Here, therefore, he admonishes the Jews that they should not foolishly promise themselves impunity, when they despised his prophecies, since he does not speak from himself, but only relates what the Spirit suggested and dictated. *Thus have ye spoken, O house of Israel*, said he, *and I have known the risings of your heart* God here precisely urges the Jews that they should not hope to obtain anything by turning their backs; for we know how carelessly and boldly hypocrites reject all teaching, and do not hesitate to strive with God, since they find many pretexts by which they excuse themselves. Hence there would be no end, unless the Lord should racet them, and with the supreme command and power of a judge, should show them that subterfuges were vain, and make all their excuses idle, and of no moment. This then is the Prophet's meaning when he says, *that whatever rose up in their heart was known to God* But by these words he implies, that they sought in vain a theater in the world, as if they should succeed if they proved their cause before men: he says that it is vain, because they must come into the court of heaven, where God will be the only Judge. Now, when our thoughts are known to God, in vain we take up with this or that; because God will not admit our subterfuges, nor will he allow himself to be deluded by our smartness and cunning. Now, therefore, we see what the Prophet means by saying that *God knows what sprang up in the heart of the Jews*, because, forsooth, they had never desisted from contending and quarreling by their fallacies, so as to draw away all confidence from his prophecies. Hence we see the utility of the doctrine, that we deceive ourselves in vain by acuteness, so as to escape by our crooked imaginations, because God sees men's cunning, and while they desire to be ingenious, he seizes them, and shows the vanity of what they think the greatest wisdom. So let us desire to approve ourselves to God, and not esteem our deeds and plans according to our own sense and judgment. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 11:6-7

6. Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, 6. Multiplicasti interfectos vestres in urbe
and ye have filled the streets thereof with the hac, et implevistis compita ejus inteffectis.
slain.

7. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Your 7. Propterea sic dicit Dominator Iehovah,
slain, whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they Interfecti vestri quos posuistis in medio ejus, ipsi

are the flesh, and this *city is* the caldron: but I erunt caro, et ipsa olla ²³⁴ et vos ejiciam e medio
will bring you forth out of the midst of it. eius.

Now Ezekiel attacks, as it were, in close combat, the buffoons who trifled with God by their jests, and brings forward that; sense which I have just before touched on, and of which the *prophecy* of Jeremiah was full, in a different manner to that. which they imagined. *Ye*, says he, *have slain many*; the city was full of many slaughters: therefore the pot was full of flesh; this flesh was cooked: there is no longer any room in the vessel. You must therefore of necessity be cast forth as froth, or as foul flesh, for which no vessel is found for cooking it. We see, then, that the Prophet here treats them wittily, and plays off jests in answer to them; meanwhile he strikes a deadly wound, when he shows that they joked so petulantly to their own destruction, and boasted that Jeremiah was their adversary. Hence he confirms the prophecy of Jeremiah, and yet he does not interpret it, because Jeremiah had spoken properly and clearly, when he said that they were flesh. The meaning was the same as if God were to pronounce that he would consume them in the midst of the city. It happened as we have formerly seen; for he scattered some of the people, and slew some with the sword, and some with hunger. Whatever it is, the prophecy of Jeremiah will always be found true, namely, that God had cooked the Jews with the fire of the Chaldees. (Jeremiah 1:13.) But since they had perverted that doctrine, the Prophet does not regard the meaning of Jeremiah, but shows that they never profited while they turned their backs on God. *Ye* shall not be flesh, says he, but your slain were flesh: *ye have refilled the caldron*, that is the city with the slain; now there is no room for you. What therefore remains, but that God should cast you out as foul flesh? Neither will he cook you, says he, nor will he consume you in a caldron, but where he has stretched you at full length on the earth, there will he consume you. Now, therefore, we see how great a destruction the Jews had brought upon themselves, when they took the liberty of joking and jesting at the Prophets. Hence he says, *they had filled the city with the slain* He does not mean that men had been openly put to death in Jerusalem, but this form of speech embraces all forms of injustice; for we know that God esteems those homicides who oppress miserable men, overturn their fortunes, and suck innocent blood. Since, then, God esteems all violence as slaughter, he properly says, *that the city was filled with the slain* The Jews might object that no one had brought violence upon them; they could not be convicted in the sight of men; but when their wickedness was so gross among themselves, that they did not spare the wretched, but cruelly afflicted them, he says that *the city was filled with the slain* He now adds, when the city was full of flesh there was no more place for them, and he now shows that although Jeremiah had predicted that they should be cooked with the fire of the Chaldeans, yet they had advanced so far in wickedness, that they were unworthy of being cooked within the city. Hence, says he, a greater vengeance from God awaits you, since ye proceed to provoke his anger more and more. It follows —

Ezekiel 11:8-11

²³⁴ Or, “caldron.” — Calvin.

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| 8. Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord GOD. | 8. Gladium timuistis, et gladium adducam super vos, dicit Dominator Iehovah. |
| 9. And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. | 9. Et ejiciam vos e medio ejus, et tradam vos in manum extraneorum, et exercebo in vos judicia. |
| 10. Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I <i>am</i> the LORD. | 10. Et gladio cadetis: ad terminum Israel judicabo vos, et scietis quod ego sim Iehovah. |
| 11. This <i>city</i> shall not be your caldron, neither shall ye be the flesh in the midst thereof; <i>but</i> I will judge you in the border of Israel: | 11. Ipsa non erit vobis in ollam: et vos non eritis ²³⁵ in medio ejus in carnem: in termino Israel judicabo vos. |

We ought to join these verses together, because the Prophet treats the same thing in many words. First *he denounces that they should perish by the sword since they feared the sword* By these words he admonishes them, that even if God should draw them out of the city, yet Jeremiah's prophecy would prove true, since the Chaldeans would consume them as if the pot was boiling on the fire. Lastly, he shows how frivolous was their cavil when they said, "if we are flesh, we shall remain in the caldron." But the Prophet shows that they must not cavil like children with God, *because* when he showed the caldron to his servant Jeremiah, he meant nothing else than that the Jews should perish, since the Chaldeans would *come* to consume them. But they had purposely perverted the Prophet's sense, and thought themselves clever and shrewd when they corrupted the heavenly doctrine. First of all the Prophet says, *ye have feared the sword, and ye shall fall by the sword: he afterwards adds the manner: I, says he, will bring the sword upon you, which ye feared: he says, I will draw you out from the midst of it.* He declares the manner: namely, that he will bring them into an open plain, that he may more easily slay them there. If any should object, that this was not seething them in the city, the answer is easy: that God did not restrict his wrath to one kind of punishment, when he thus spoke by Jeremiah. For we know that the Prophets set before us God's judgments in various ways, and thus use various figures. Since therefore the Prophets do not always teach in the same manner, it is not surprising if, when he shortly shows that God's wrath was near the Jews, he used that simile: *ye shall fall, says he, by the sword, and in the borders of Israel shall I judge you.*

Here he clearly expresses what I lately touched upon. It was indeed God's judgment, when the Jews were drawn from the city in which they thought they had a quiet nest: for when they were violently dragged into exile, God exercised his judgments upon them: and from the time when he deprived them of their country, then he already began to be their judge. But here he begins to treat of a severer judgment. Although God had begun to chastise the Jews when he expelled them from the city, yet he treated them more severely in the boundaries of Israel; because when they came in sight of the king of Babylon, then the king saw his slain: then he himself was rendered blind and dragged into Chaldea, and all the nobles slain. (2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 39.) Hence we may gather

²³⁵ The negative must be understood. — Calvin.

that the people's blood was poured out without discrimination. Now therefore we understand what God means when he threatens *to judge them in the borders of Israel*, that is without their country. Lastly, he here denounces a double penalty, first because God would east them out of Jerusalem in which they delighted, and in which they said that they should dwell so long that exile would be their first punishment: then he adds, that he was not content with exile, but that a heavier punishment was at hand, when they should be cast out of their country, and the land should cast them forth as a stench which it cannot bear. *I will judge you therefore in the borders of Israel*: that is, beyond the holy land: for since one curse has already occurred in exile, still a harder and more formidable revenge will await you. Now he adds, *ye shall know that I am Jehovah*

Doubtless Ezekiel reproves the sloth which was the cause of such great contumacy: for they had never dared to contend so perseveringly with God, unless their minds had been stupified; for were we to reflect that we are striving with God, horror would immediately seize upon us; for who labors under such madness as to dare to contend with God his maker? This torpor, therefore, Ezekiel now obliquely reproves, when he says that the Jews would know too late that they were dealing with God. Although therefore they sinned through ignorance, it does not follow that they were without excuse, for whence arose their ignorance except from being inattentive to God? It sprang first from carelessness: then that carelessness and security produced contempt, and contempt sprang from their depraved lust of sinning. Since therefore they determined to give themselves up to all manner of sinning, they put away as far as possible all teaching: nay they willingly endeavored to stupify their own consciences, and thus we see that depraved desire impelled them to contempt, and contempt begat in them security, in which at length this ignorance plunged them. Since therefore at the time it did not come into their mind to contend with God, this does not extenuate their fault, because, as I have said, they had stupified themselves with determined and spontaneous *wickedness*.

Meanwhile, it is by no means doubtful that God always pricked them that they might feel themselves sinners, but the Prophet here speaks of that knowledge which is called experimental. For the impious are said to know God when, being struck by his hand, they unwillingly *acknowledge* his power: because whether they will or not they feel him to be their judge. But this *knowledge* does not profit them; nay even increases their destruction. But we understand the Prophet's meaning, that the *Jews* were rebellious and despised God's servants: because they pretended that they had to do only with men, and covered themselves with darkness, lest they should behold the light which was offered to their eyes. God pronounces that they should know at length with whom they contended, as Zechariah says, they shall see whom they have pierced; (Zechariah 12:10;) that is, they shall know that it is I whom they have wounded, when they so proudly despised my servants, and abjured all confidence in my teaching. Hence also we gather that the minds of the impious were so confused, that seeing they did not see; for when they experience God to be their judge, they are compelled in reality to confess that they feel his hand: yet they remain stupid, because they do not profit, as the Prophet had just now said, — ye feared the sword. But they were careless, as we saw, and despised all threats. Of what kind, then, is this fear which is remarked upon by the Prophet? that of the impious forsooth, who while they make for themselves blandishments, and fancy that they have made a covenant with death, as is said in Isaiah, (Isaiah 28:15; Isaiah 48:22; and Isaiah 57:21,) and promise themselves freedom from punishment, even when a scourge is passing through the land, yet tremble and are always ill-at-ease, because they have no peace, as it is said elsewhere. In fine, we see the impious always remaining careless and stupid: though they are careless, yet they tremble and are tortured with secret impiety, since the severity of God urges

them on. At length he concludes, *Jerusalem should not be their caldron*, but he would punish them *in the border of Israel* But I have sufficiently explained this clause. It follows —

Ezekiel 11:12

12. And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD: **12.** Et cognoscentis quod ego sim Iehovah; for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither quia in statutis meis non ambulastis, et judicia executed my judgments, but have done after the mea non fecistis: sed secundum judicia gentium manners of the heathen that *are* round about you. quae in circmitu vestro sunt, fecistis.

He repeats what he had said, that they would acknowledge too late how impiously and wickedly they had despised the prophecies: because this was to draw down God himself from heaven; for God wishes that reverence which he exacts from us to be given to his own word. Therefore men rage in contempt of his teaching, as if after the manner of giants they wished to draw God down from heaven. But he expresses the cause more clearly: *because indeed they have not walked in his law and his precepts; but have entangled themselves in the superstitions of the nations* Here we see that God could not possibly be accused of too much rigor, because he executed a judgment so heavy and severe against the Jews. For he had given them the law. This was the greatest ingratitude, to reject the teaching, which ought to be familiar to them, and at the same time to add to it the impious rites of the Gentiles: this was to prefer the devil to God himself with full deliberation. Hence God shows that although he would treat the Jews severely, yet that his wrath was moderate compared with their sins: because nothing was wanting to complete their impiety when they so rejected his law. When therefore he says that *they did not walk in the law*, he takes this principle for granted, that the law was not given in vain, but that in it the Jews were, faithfully and clearly taught the right way, as also Moses says, “this is the way, walk ye in it.” There is no doubt that Ezekiel referred to that sentence of Moses, when he said,

that the Jews did not walk in the law, and did not perform the judgments of God. (Deuteronomy 5:33; Isaiah 30:21.)

Since therefore God has shown the way, so that they had no excuse for wandering, how great was their ingratitude in leaving the way and willfully casting themselves into wanderings?

Now comparison aggravates their crime, when he says, *that they preferred the judgments and rites of the Gentiles which were around them* Because they had unbelieving neighbors, God had opposed his law like a rampart to separate them from the profane Gentiles. Since therefore they had so far approached these detestable rites, and that too by rejecting utterly the law of God, do we not perceive that they were worthy of severe punishment? Meanwhile let us observe, when God has borne with us a long time, if we persist in our obstinacy, that nothing else is left but the extinction of the light of doctrine, and that God should show himself in some other manner. For the Prophet’s discourse is like a glass, in which God represents himself. But when we shut our eyes and throw down the glass and break it, then God shows himself in some other manner; that is, he no longer thinks it right to show us his face, but teaches us by his hand, and convinces us of our impious obstinacy by a proof of his power, because we were unwilling to submit to his teaching. It follows —

Ezekiel 11:13

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| <p>13. And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, meam, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?</p> | <p>13. Et fuit cum prophetarem, tunc Phalatias filius Benaïm mortuus est: et cecidi super faciem meam, et clamavi voce magna, et dixi, Heus Dominator Iehovah, tu consumptionem facies residui Israel?</p> |
|---|---|

It is by no means doubtful that this Phalatias died at the same time at which the vision was offered to God's servant. We shall see at the end of the chapter that the Prophet was always in exile; but then he seemed to himself caught up into the temple, and seemed also to himself to behold Phalatias dead. And yet it is possible that he died at his own home, and not in the entrance or threshold of the temple. But we know that the vision was not limited to places. As, therefore, Ezekiel was only by vision in the temple, so also he saw the death of Phalatias; and in this way God began by a kind of prelude to show that the slaughter of the city was at hand. For Phalatias was one of the chief rulers, as was said in the first verse of this chapter, and was doubtless a man of good reputation: hence his death was a presage of a general destruction. Hence this exclamation of the Prophet, *Ah Lord God, wilt thou utterly consume the remnant of Israel?* for now only a small number out of an immense multitude remained. Phalatias is seized, and in this way he shows that destruction hangs over the whole people. Hence it came to pass that the Prophet fell upon the earth astonished, and exclaimed that it was by no means agreeable to God's promises to destroy the remnant of Israel. For some remnant ought to remain, as we often see in other places: even in the general slaughter of the whole people, God always gave some hope that he would not abolish his covenant. For this reason the Prophet now exclaims.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since we cease not to provoke thine anger every day, that at least being admonished by the prophecies which thine ancient people did not despise with impunity, we may be touched with a true sense of penitence, and may we so submit ourselves to thee, that we may willingly humble and renounce ourselves; and not only do thou mitigate the punishments which otherwise hang over us, but also show thyself a merciful and gracious Father towards us, until at length we enjoy the fullness of thy fatherly love in thy heavenly kingdom, through Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE TWENTY-NINTH

IN the last Lecture the Prophet's complaint and lamentation on account of the death of Phalatias, was described to us. He had heard indeed by the Spirit that Phalatias and others like him were impious despisers of God, and corrupters of his whole worship: yet he exclaims when he sees him dead, as if all things were lost. But we must remember that the Prophet did not speak in his own

senses.²³⁶ He regards also the reputation and dignity of Phalatias, for there is no doubt that he excelled the other elders, as the greater of the people thought their own stability depended on his counsel and prudence. Since, therefore, almost all thought Phalatias to be the support of the city and kingdom, it is not surprising that the Prophet, according to the common opinion, asks with wonder whether God is about to consume every remnant of the people. And he alludes to the man's name, For *phelet*, is to escape; whence *(phelitim)* is the name for survivors, and those who escape from any danger or slaughter. Since, therefore, Phalatias carried in his very name something of this kind, viz., if there was any hope of safety for them, it resided in his person: for this reason the Prophet asks whether God will destroy the remnant of his people. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 11:14-16

14. Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **14.** Et fuit sermo Iehovah ad me, dicendo,

15. Son of man, thy brethren, *even* thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the propinquitatis tuae, et omnis domus Israel tota house of Israel wholly, *are* they unto whom the ipsa: quibus dixerunt ipsis incolae Ierusalem, inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far Procul discedite a Iehovah, nobis data est terra from the LORD: unto us is this land given in in haereditatem. possession.

16. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **16.** Propterea dic, Sic dicit Dominator Although I have cast them far off among the Iehovah, Quia procul ejecti estis inter gentes, et heathen, and although I have scattered them quia dispersi estis per tetras: ideo²³⁷ ero ipsis in among the countries, yet will I be to them as a sanctorum²³⁸ in terris ad quas venerunt. little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.

Here God seems to rebuke the thoughtlessness of his servant, or rather the error of the people, because we said that the Prophet announced not what he privately thought, but what was commonly received. Whatever it is, God answers his complaint as we saw, and shows that even if he takes away from the midst the eminent and conspicuous, and those who seem to be the supports of a city and kingdom, yet the Church does not perish on that account, because he has hidden reasons why he preserves it, not in splendid and magnificent pomp, as men call it, but that its safety may at length excite admiration. The sum of the matter is, therefore, although not only Phalatias, but all the councillors of the king, and all the leaders of the people should perish, yet that God can work in weakness, so that the Church shall nevertheless remain safe: and so he teaches that the remnant must not be sought in that rank which was then conspicuous, but rather among men ordinary and despised. Now we understand the intention of God in this answer.

²³⁶ “Ex proprio sensu:” — in contrast to prophetic inspiration.

²³⁷ “Therefore” — the copula ought to be resolved into the causative. — *Calvin*.

²³⁸ Or, “of fewness.” — *Calvin*.

He says therefore, *thy brethren, thy brethren, and the men of thy relationship*. He here recalls his servant to the exiles and the captives, of whom he himself was one, as if he would say that they were not cast out of the Church, as they were still in some estimation. For God seemed to cast them off when he banished them from the promised land; but he now shows that they were reckoned among his sons although disinherited from the land of Canaan. Hence he twice repeats the name of brethren, and adds, *men of thy relationship*, that the Prophet might rather reckon himself also to be among the number. Those who refer this to the three exiles, weaken the vehemence of the passage, whilst they obtrude an inappropriate comment, and turn away the reader from the genuine sense of the Prophet. But rather, as I lately hinted, God here chastises the Prophet because he perversely restricts the body of the Church to the citizens at Jerusalem; as if he said, although the Israelites are captives, yet do they seem to you foreigners? and so will you not leave them a place in the Church? *They are, therefore, thy brethren, thy brethren*, says he, and *the men of thy relationship*. Hence the repetition is emphatic, and tends to this purpose, that the Prophet may cease to measure God's grace by the safety of the city alone, as he had done. Because one man had suddenly died, he thought that all must perish. Meanwhile he did not *perceive* how he injured the miserable exiles, whom God had so expelled from the land of Canaan, that yet some hope of pity remained, as all the Prophets show, and as we shall soon see. This passage then is worthy of observation, that we may learn not to estimate the state of the Church by the common opinion of mankind. And so with respect to the splendor which too often blinds the eyes of the simple. For it will so happen, that we think we have found the Church where there is none, and we despair if it does not offer itself to our eyes; as we see at this day that many are astonished by those magnificent pomp which are conspicuous in the Papacy. There the name of "The Church" keeps flying bravely in the face of all: there also its marks are brought forward: the simple are attracted to the empty spectacle: so under the name of the Church they are drawn to destruction; because they determine that the Church is there where that splendor which deceives them is seen. On the other hand, many who cannot discern the Church with their eyes and point to it with the finger, accuse God of deceiving them, as if all the faithful in the world were extinct. We must hold, therefore, that the Church is often wonderfully preserved in its hiding — places: for its members are not luxurious men, or such as win the veneration of the foolish by vain ostentation; but rather ordinary men, of no estimation in the world. We have a memorable example of this, when God recalls his own Prophet from the chief leaders at Jerusalem, not to other leaders, who should attract men to wonder at themselves, but to miserable exiles, whose dispersion rendered them despicable. He shows therefore that some remnants were left even in Chaldea.

Now it follows, *to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem said, depart, ye far from the sanctuary of Jehovah, the land is given to us*. Here God inveighs against the arrogance of the people, which remained at home quiet and careless. For he here relates the words of the citizens of Jerusalem, because, forsooth, they preferred themselves to the exiles, nay boasted that they were alienated from the holy people because they had been dragged into exile, or had left the city of their own accord. As to their saying, *depart afar off*, it ought not to be taken strictly in the imperative mood; but the speech ought so to be understood, that while they depart far from the sanctuary, the land will remain as an inheritance for us. We see, therefore, that the citizens of Jerusalem pleased themselves, and were satisfied with their own ease, since they still enjoyed their country, worshipped God in the temple, and the name of a kingdom was still standing. Since therefore they so enjoyed themselves, God shows that on the contrary they were blinded with pride, since he had not entirely

cast away his captives, although he afflicted them with temporal punishment. But this their boasting was *very* foolish, in congratulating themselves on their escape from exile. For meanwhile what was their state? In truth their king' was treated with ignominy, and we know what happened to themselves afterwards; for they were reduced to such straits, that mothers devoured their children, and those nourished in great, luxury consumed their dung. Nay even before the city was besieged, what reason was left them for boasting in themselves! but we here perceive how great was their obstinacy in which they hardened themselves against the scourge of God. Hence they stupidly supposed that God could not subdue them. Now what is their ferocity, that they insult over the miserable exiles as if they were cast away far from God? since Ezekiel and Daniel and their companions were among these exiles. We know that Daniel's piety was so celebrated at Jerusalem, that they all acknowledged him as the peculiar gift and ornament of his age. When, therefore, Daniel was in such estimation for superior piety, how could they erect their crests against him — since they were Conscious of many crimes, profane, full of all defilements, addicted to cruelty, fraud, and perjury, being foul in their abominations, and infamous in their intemperance?

Since therefore we see that they so boldly insulted their brethren, can we wonder that at this day the Papists also are fierce, because they retain the ordinary succession and the title of the Church, and that they say that we are cast away and cut off from the Church, and so are unworthy of enjoying either a name or a place among Christians? If, therefore, at this day the Papists are so hot against us, there is no reason why their haughtiness should disturb us; but in this mirror we may learn that it always was so. But there was another reason why the citizens of Jerusalem said that their captives were cast far away. For it was clear that their exile was the just penalty for their crimes; but meanwhile how did they dare separate themselves from others, when their life was more wicked? Lastly, since God had already passed sentence upon them, their condition could not be really different from theirs, concerning whom the judge had pronounced his opinion, but they were deaf to all the Prophets' threats, so that they despised God, and hence that boasting which treated all as foreigners who did not remain in the land of Canaan. This passage also teaches us, that if God at any time chastises those who profess the same religion with us, yet there is no reason why we should entirely condemn them, as if they were desperate; for opportunity must be given for the mercy of God. And we must diligently mark what follows. For after the Prophet has related that the citizens of Jerusalem boasted when they thought themselves the sole survivors, God answers on the contrary, *because they were cast away far among the nations, and dispersed among the lands, or through the lands, therefore I shall be to them as a small sanctuary*

We see that God even here claims some place for sinners in the Church, against whom he had exercised the rigor of his judgment. He says, by way of concession, *that they were cast away and dispersed*, but he adds, *that he was still with them for a sanctuary*; nay, because they bore their exile calmly and with equanimity, they pronounce this to be a reason why he should pity them. For neither is their sentence so general that God overlooked his own elect. This promise then ought not to be extended to all the captives without discrimination, because we shall see that God included only a few. Without doubt then, this was a peculiar promise which God wished to be a consolation to his elect. He says, *because they bore exile and dispersion with calmness and composure, therefore God would be a sanctuary to them* But this was a gracious approval of their modesty and subjection, because they not only suffered exile but also dispersion, which was more severe. For if they had all been drawn into a distant region this had been a severe trial, but still they might have united more easily, had they not been dispersed. This second punishment was the sadder to them, because

they perceived in it the material for despair, as if they could never be collected together again in one body.

thus their wrestling with these temptations was a sign of no little piety; and as some of the faithful did not demonstrate their obedience at once, yet because God knows his own, (2 Timothy 2:19,) and watches for their safety, hence he here opposes to all their miseries that protection on which their safety was founded. Because, therefore, *they were dispersed through the lands, hence, says he, I will be to them a small sanctuary*

The third person is here used. Interpreters make *megnet*, mean the noun *toar*, and understand it as “a small sanctuary,” although it may be taken for a paucity of men, and we may, therefore, fairly translate it “a sanctuary of security.” Although the other sense suits the passage best, that God would be a small sanctuary to the captives, so there will be an antithesis between the splendor of the visible temple and the hidden grace of God, which so escaped the notice of the Chaldeans that they rather trod it under foot, and even the Jews who still remained at Jerusalem despised it. The sanctuary, therefore, which God had chosen for himself on Mount Zion, because it deservedly attracted all eyes towards it, and the Israelites were always gazing at it, since it revealed the majesty of God, might be called the magnificent sanctuary of God: nothing of the sort was seen in the Babylonish exile: but God says, *that he was to the captives as a small or contracted sanctuary* This place answers to the 90th Psalm, where Moses says, Thou, O God, hast always been a tabernacle to us, (Psalm 90:1,) and yet God had not always either a temple or a tabernacle from which he entered into a covenant with the fathers. But Moses there *teaches* what God afterwards represented by a visible symbol, that the fathers really thought that they truly lay hid under the shadow of God’s wings, and were not otherwise safe and sheltered unless God protected them. Moses, therefore, in the name of the fathers, celebrates the grace of God which was continual even before the sanctuary was built. So also in this place God says by a figure, *that he was their sanctuary*, not that he had erected an altar there, but because the Israelites were destitute of any external pledge and symbol, he reminds them that the thing itself was not entirely taken away, since God had his wings outstretched to cherish and defend them. This passage is also worthy of notice, lest the faithful should despond where God has no standard erected: although he does not openly go before them with royal ensigns to preserve them, yet they need not conclude themselves altogether deserted; but they should recall to remembrance what is here said of a *small sanctuary*. God, therefore, although he does not openly exhibit his influence, yet he does not cease to preserve them by a secret power, of which in this our age we have a very remarkable proof. The world indeed thinks us lost as often as the Church is materially injured, and the greater part become very anxious, as if God had deserted them. Then let this promise be remembered as a remedy, *God is to the dispersed and cast away a small sanctuary*; so that although his hand is hidden, yet our safety proves that he has worked powerfully in our weakness. We see then that this sense is most suitable, and contains very useful doctrine. Yet the other sense will suit, that God is “the sanctuary of a few,” because in that great multitude but few remain who are really the people of God, for the greater part was ignorant of him; since then God does not regard that multitude of the impious which was already within the Church, but only here directs his discourse towards his own elect, it is not surprising that he asserts them to be but few in number. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 11:17

17. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD, **17.** Propterea dices, Sic dicit Dominator I will even gather you from among the people, Iehovah, congregabo vos e populis, et colligam and assemble you out of the countries where ye vos et terris, ad quas expulsi estis, et dabo vobis have been scattered, and I will give you the land terrain Israel. of Israel.

Now God expresses the effect of his grace. In the last verse he had said that he would be a sanctuary. I have reminded you that these words ought not to be understood of a visible place in which God was worshipped, but of that hidden influence by which he cherishes his people. But if the exile had been perpetual, that promise might seem vain. Why then did God protect his people in exile, if he wished them to be consumed there? because otherwise his covenant would have been in vain. Therefore lest any one should object that God deceives his faithful ones, when he pronounces that he would be their sanctuary, he now points out its result, viz., that he would restore them to their country. *Therefore, says he, I will collect you from the people, and gather you from the nations to which ye have been, driven, and I will give you the land of Israel* Since therefore a return to their country was a certain pledge of God's love, hence he announces that they should at length return. On the whole the restitution of the Church is promised, which should confirm God's covenant. In it had been said to Abraham, I will give this land to thee and to thy seed for ever. (Genesis 13:15; and Genesis 17:8.) God, therefore, to show his covenant still remaining entire and secure, which he had interrupted for a short time, here speaks concerning this restoration. And as to the Prophet so often inculcating the name of God, and relating his orders in God's name, and directing his discourse to the captives, this tends to confirm his message, because in such a desperate state of things it was difficult to wait patiently for what the Prophet taught, viz., that a time would come when God would collect them again, and recall them home. Hence the faithful were admonished that they must consider God's power, and put their trust in this prophecy. It follows —

Ezekiel 11:18

18. And they shall come thither, and they **18.** Et venient illuc, et tollent omnia idola shall take away all the detestable things thereof ejus, et omnes abominationes ejus ex ea. and all the abominations thereof from thence.

Here he adds something more important — that when the Israelites had returned to their country they would be sincere worshippers of God, and not only offer sacrifices in the temple, but purge the land of all its pollutions. Here also the Prophet admonishes them how great and detestable was the impiety of the ten tribes, because they had contaminated the land with idols. He does not here allude to the idols of the Gentiles, but rather reproves the Israelites because they had contaminated with their defilements the land which had been dedicated to God. Hence the Prophet exhorted his countrymen to repentance, when he shows that they were not cast out of the land before it was polluted; and therefore that they were justly punished for their sacrilege. This is one point. Afterwards

we must remark, that we then truly and purely enjoy God's blessings, when we direct their use to that end which is here set before us, namely, pure and proper worship. Nothing more frequently meets us than this teaching — that we have been redeemed by God that we may celebrate his glory; that the Church was planted that in it he may be glorified, and we may make known his attributes. Hence let us learn that God's benefits then issue in our safety, and are testimonies of his paternal favor when they excite us to worship him. Thirdly, we must remark, that we do not rightly discharge our duty towards God, unless when we purge his worship from all stain and defilement. Many so worship God, that they corrupt with vicious mixtures whatever obedience they seem to render. And to this day even, those who seem to themselves very wise, are shamefully divided between God and the devil, as if they could satisfy God with half their allegiance. Hence let us learn from this passage, that God abhors such deceivers; for when he says that the Israelites after their return should be devoted to piety, he indicates it by this mark — *that they shall take away all their abominations, and all their idols from the land* It afterwards follows —

Ezekiel 11:19-20

19. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: **19.** Et dabo illis cor unum, et spiritum novum ponam in visceribus eorum, et tollam cor lapideum e carne ipsorum, et dabo ipsis cor carneum.

20. That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. **20.** Ut in statutis meis ambulent, et iudicia mea custodiant, et faciant ea: et erunt mihi in populum, et ego ero ipsis in Deum.

As God had already spoken concerning the piety of the Israelites, he shows that they could not forsake their sins until they were renewed, and so born again by his Spirit. Therefore he seemed in the last verse to praise the Israelites; but because men too eagerly claim as their own what has been given them from above, now God claims to himself glow of their virtues, of which he had formerly spoken. Their zeal in purging the land of all abominations was worthy of praise; hence the survivors of the people of Israel are deservedly celebrated, because they were impelled by the fervor of zeal to free the worship of God from all corruptions; but lest they should boast, that they had done it in their own strength, and from the impulse of their own hearts, God now modifies his former assertions, and shows that such pursuit of piety would exist among the Israelites, after he had regenerated them by his Spirit. And this plea alone may suffice to refute the Papists, as often as they seize upon such passages from the Scriptures, where God either exacts something from his people, or proclaims their virtues. David does this; hence he does it of his own free will: God requires this; hence it is in the will of men that they are equal to the performance of all things. Thus they trifle. But we see that the Prophet unites two things together, namely, the faithful elect of God strenuously attending to their duty, and intent on promoting his glory, even with ardor in the pursuit of his worship; and yet they were nothing by themselves. Hence it is added immediately afterwards — *I will give them one heart, and will put a new spirit in their breasts* But we must defer the rest to the next lecture.

PRAYER.

Grant, O Almighty God, that we may learn to cast our eyes upon the state of thine ancient Church, since at the present day the sorrowful and manifest dispersion of thy Church seems to threaten its complete destruction: Grant also, that we may look upon those promises which are common to us also, that we may wait till thy Church emerges again from the darkness of death. Meanwhile, may we be content with thy help, however weak as to outward appearance, till at length it shall appear that our patience was not delusive, when we enjoy the reward of our faith and patience in thy heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE THIRTIETH.

In the last lecture, after Ezekiel had announced the conversion of the people, at the same time he taught that the singular gift of repentance would be bestowed: because when any one has turned aside from the right way, unless God extends his hand, he will plunge himself even into the deep abyss. Hence after a man has once left God, he cannot return to him by himself. We then touched shortly on this doctrine: now a fuller explanation must be added. As soon as we consider the Prophet's words, we shall at once understand the matter. God promises *to give the people one heart*. Some explain this of mutual consent, but it does not suit in my opinion. In the third chapter of Zephaniah, at verse 9, (Zephaniah 3:9) "one shoulder" is taken in this sense. For when the Prophet says, that God would make all call upon him purely and worship with one shoulder, he seems to mean that all should be unanimous, and that each would excite, his neighbor. But in this place one heart is rather opposed to a divided one; for the Israelites were distracted after vague errors. They ought to listen to God's precepts, and subject themselves to his law: thus they had been content with him alone, and had addicted themselves entirely to true piety. But their heart was distracted: as when a woman does not preserve her fidelity to her husband, but is led away by her lusts, nothing is at rest in her. So also when the people revolted from the law of God, it was like a wandering harlot. We see, therefore, that the hearts of all the impious were divided and distracted, and that nothing in them was simple or sincere. Now God promises that he would take care that the people were not drawn aside after their superstitions, but remained in pure and simple obedience to the law. If any one objects, that the faithful endure a perpetual contest with the lusts of the flesh, and hence their heart is divided, the answer is easy, that one heart is understood in the sense of regeneration. For although the faithful feel a great contest within them, and their heart is by no means whole, since it is agitated by many temptations, yet as in the meantime they seriously aspire to God, their heart is said to be entire, because it is not double or feigned. We understand then what the Prophet means, and at chapter 36, (Jeremiah 36) where he repeats the same sentiment, for one heart he puts a new spirit, as also he says a little afterwards, *I will put a new spirit in their bowels, or inward parts*. As by the word heart he means affections, so also by the spirit he signifies the mind itself and all its thoughts. the spirit of a man is often taken for the whole soul, and then it comprehends also all the affections. But where the two are joined together, as the heart and spirit, the heart is called the seat of all the affections, it is in truth the very will of man, while the spirit is the faculty of intelligence. For we know that there are two special endowments of the mind: the first is its power of reasoning, and the next its being endued with judgment and choice: afterwards we shall say how men have the faculty of choosing and yet want free will. But this principle must

be held, that the soul of man excels first in intelligence or reason, then in judgment, on which choice and will depend. We see, therefore, that by these words the Prophet testifies that men have need of a complete renovation that they may return into the way from which they once began to wander.

Afterwards he adds, *I will take away the heart of stone, or the stony heart, from their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh.* The word flesh is here received in a different sense; for the Prophet alludes to the heart, which we know to be part of the human body, when he says, *I will take away the heart of stone from their flesh.* When God regenerates his elect, he does not change either their flesh, or skin, or blood; the spiritual and interior grace has no relation to their body: but the Prophet speaks rather grossly, that he may conform his discourse to the state of a rude and gross people. For flesh in the former clause meant the same as body: but at the end of the 'verse a fleshy heart is put for a flexible heart: an opposition also must be marked between the flesh and a stone: a stone by its own hardness repels even the strongest blows of the hammers, and nothing can be inscribed on it; but the fleshy heart by its softness admits whatever is inscribed or engraven on it. The Prophet speaks grossly, as I have said, yet the sense is by no means ambiguous: namely, since the Israelites were full of obstinacy, God afterwards changed their heart, so that they became flexible and obedient that is, by correcting their hardness he rendered their heart soft.

He adds afterwards, *that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God* Now the Prophet more clearly expresses how God would give his elect hearts of flesh instead of those of stone, when he regenerates them by his Spirit, and when he forms them to obey his law, so that they may willingly observe his commands, and efficiently accomplish what he causes them to will. Now let us consider more attentively the whole matter of which the Prophet treats. When God speaks of a stony heart, he doubtless condemns all mortals of obstinacy. For the Prophet is not here treating of a few whose nature differs from others, but as in a glass he puts the Israelites before us, that we know what our condition is, when being deserted by God we follow our natural inclinations. We collect, therefore, from this place, that all have a heart of stone, that is, that all are so corrupt that they cannot bear to obey God, since they are entirely carried away to obstinacy. Meanwhile it is certain that this fault is adventitious: for when God created man he did not bestow upon him a heart of stone, and as long as Adam stood sinless, doubtless his will was upright and well disposed, and it was also inclined to obedience to God. When therefore we say that our heart is of stone, this takes its origin from the fall of Adam, and from the corruption of our nature; for if Adam had been created with a hard and obstinate heart, that would have been a reproach to God. But as we have said, the will of Adam was upright from the beginning, and flexible to follow the righteousness of God; but when Adam corrupted himself, we perished with him. Hence, therefore, the stony heart, because we have put off that integrity of nature which God had conferred upon us at the beginning. For whatever Adam lost we also lost by the fall: because he was not created for his own self alone, but in his person God showed what would be the condition of the human race. Hence after he had been spoiled of the excellent gifts by which he was adorned, all his posterity were reduced to the same want and misery. Hence our heart is stony; but through original depravity, because we ought to attribute this to our father Adam, and not to throw the fault of our sin and corruption on God. Finally, we see what the beginning of regeneration is, namely, when God takes away that depravity by which we are bound down. But two parts of regeneration must be marked, of which also the Prophet treats.

God pronounces *that he gives to his elect one heart and new spirit* It follows, therefore, that the whole soul is vitiated, from reason even to the affections. The sophists in the Papacy confess

that man's soul is vitiated, but only in part. They are also compelled to subscribe to the ancients, that Adam lost supernatural gifts, and that natural ones were corrupted, but afterwards they involve the light in darkness, and feign that some part of the reason remains sound and entire, then that the will is vitiated only in part: hence it is a common saying of theirs, that man's free will was wounded and injured, but that it did not perish. Now they define free will, the free faculty of choice, which is joined with reason and also depends upon it. For the will by itself, without the judgment, does not contain full and solid liberty, but when reason governs and holds the chief power in the soul of man, then the will obeys and forms itself after the *prescribed* rule: that is free will. The Papists do not deny that free will is injured and wounded, but as I have already said, they hold back something, as if men were partly right by their own proper motion, and some inclination or flexible motion of the will remained as well towards good as evil. Thus indeed they prate in the schools: but we see what the Holy Spirit pronounces. For if there is need of a new spirit and a new heart, it follows that the soul of man is not only injured in each part, but so corrupt that its depravity may be called death and destruction, as far as rectitude is concerned. But here a question is objected, whether men differ at all from brute beasts? But experience proves that men are endued with some reason. I answer, as it is said in the first chapter of John, (John 1:5,) that light shines in darkness; that is, that some sparks of intelligence remain, but so far from leading any man into the way, they do not enable him to see it. Hence whatever reason and intelligence there is in us, it does not bring us into the path of obedience to God, and much less leads by continual perseverance to the goal.

What then? These very sparks shine in the darkness to render men without excuse. Behold, therefore, how far man's reason prevails, that he may feel self-convinced that no pretext for ignorance or error remains to him. Therefore man's intelligence is altogether useless towards guiding his life aright. Perverseness more clearly appears in his heart. For man's will boils over to obstinacy, and when anything right and what God approves is put before us, our affections immediately become restive and ferocious; like a refractory horse when he feels the spur leaps up and strikes his rider, so our will betrays its obstinacy when it admits nothing but what reason and a sound intelligence dictates. I have already taught that man's reason is blind, but that blindness is not so perspicuous in us, because, as I have said, God has left in us some light, that no excuse for error should remain. It is not surprising, then, if God here promises *that he would give a new heart*, because if we examine all the affections of men, we shall find them hostile to God. For that passage of St. Paul (Romans 8:9) is true, that all the thoughts of the flesh are hostile to God. Doubtless he there takes the flesh after his own manner, namely, as signifying the whole man as he is by nature and is born into the world. Since, therefore, all our affections are hostile and repugnant to God, we see how foolishly the schoolmen trifle, who feign that the will is injured, and so this weakness is to them in the place of death. Paul says that he was sold under sin, that is, as far as he was one of the sons of Adam: The law, he says, works in us sin, (Romans 7:14,) I am sold and enslaved to sin. But what do they say? That sin indeed reigns in us, but only in part, for there is some integrity which resists it. How far they differ from St. Paul! But this passage also with sufficient clearness refutes comments of this kind, where God pronounces *that newness of heart and spirit is his own free gift* Therefore Scripture uses the name of creation elsewhere, which is worthy of notice. For as often as the Papists boast that they have even the least particle of rectitude, they reckon themselves creators: since when Paul says that we are born again by God's Spirit, he calls us τὸ ποίημα, his fashioning or workmanship, and explains that we are created unto good works. (Ephesians 2:10.) To the same purpose is the language of the Psalm, (Psalm 100:3,) he made us, not we ourselves. For he is not

treating here of that first creation by which we became men, but of that special grace by which we are born again by the Spirit of God. If therefore regeneration is a creation of man, whoever arrogates to himself even the least share in the matter, seizes so much from God, as if he were his own creator, which is detestable to be heard of. And yet this is easily elicited from the common teaching of Scripture.

Now it follows, *that they shall walk in my statutes, and keep my precepts and do them* Here the Prophet removes other doubts, by which Satan has endeavored to obscure the grace of God, because he could not entirely destroy it. We have already seen that the Papists do not entirely take away the grace of God; for they are compelled to confess that man can do nothing except he is assisted by God's grace: that free will lies without vigor and efficacy until it revives by the assistance of grace. Hence they have that in common with us, that man, as he is corrupt, cannot even move a finger so as to discharge any duty towards God. But here they err in two ways, because, as I have already said, they feign that some-right motion remains in man's will, besides that there is sound reason in the mind; and they afterwards add that the grace of the Holy Spirit is not efficacious without the concurrence or co-operation of our free will. And here their gross impiety is detected. Hence they confess that we are regenerated by the Spirit of God, because we should otherwise be useless to think anything aright, namely, because weakness hinders us from willing efficaciously. But, on the contrary, they imagine God's grace to be mutilated, but how? because God's grace stirs us up towards ourselves, so that we become able to wish well, and also to follow out and perfect what we have willed.

We see, therefore, that when they treat of the grace of the Holy Spirit, they leave man suspended in the midst. How far then does the Spirit of God work within us? They say, that we may be able to will rightly and to act rightly. Hence nothing else is given us by the Holy Spirit but the ability: but it is ours to co-operate, and to strengthen and to establish what otherwise would be of no avail. For what advantage is there in the ability without the addition of the upright will? Our condemnation would only be increased. But here is their ridiculous ignorance, for how could any one stand even for a single moment, if God conferred on us only the ability. Adam had that ability in his first creation, and then he was as yet perfect, but we are depraved; so that as far as the remains of the flesh abide in us which we carry about in this life, we must strive with great difficulties. If therefore Adam by and bye fell, although endued with rectitude of nature and with the faculty of willing and of acting uprightly, what will become of us? for we have need not only of Adam's uprightness, and of his faculty of both willing and acting uprightly, but we have need of unconquered fortitude, that we may not yield to temptations, but be superior to the devil, and subdue all depraved and vicious affections of the flesh, and persevere unto the end in this wrestling or warfare. We see, therefore, how childishly they trifle who ascribe nothing else to the grace of the Holy Spirit unless the gift of ability. And Augustine expounds this wisely, and treats it at sufficient length in his book "Concerning the gift of perseverance, and the predestination of the saints;" for he compares us with the first Adam, and shows that God's grace would not be efficacious, except in the case of a single individual, unless he granted us more than the ability. But what need have we of human testimonies, when the Holy Spirit clearly pronounces by the mouth of his Prophet what we here read? Ezekiel does not say: I will give them a new spirit or a new heart, that they may walk and be endued with that moderate faculty: what then? *that they may walk in my precepts, that they may keep my statutes, and perform, my commands* We see therefore that regeneration extends so far that the effect follows, as also Paul teaches: Complete, says he, your salvation with fear and trembling, (Philippians 2:12;)

here he exhorts the faithful to the attempt. And truly God does not wish us to be like stones. Let us strive therefore and stretch all our nerves, and do our utmost towards acting uprightly: but Paul advises that to be done with fear and trembling; that is, by casting away all confidence in one's own strength, because if we are intoxicated with that diabolical pretense that we are fellow-workers with God, and that his grace is assisted by the motion of our free will, we shall break down, and at length God will show how great our blindness was. Paul gives the reason, because, says he, it is God who works both to will and to accomplish. (Philippians 2:13.) He does not say there that it is God who works the ability, and who excites in us the power of willing, but he says that God is the author of that upright will, and then he adds also the effect; because it is not sufficient to will unless we are able to execute. As to the word "power," Paul does not use it, for it would occasion dispute, but he says that God works in all of us to accomplish.

If any one object, that men naturally will and act naturally by their own proper judgment and motion, I answer, that the will is naturally implanted in man, whence this faculty belongs equally to the elect and the reprobate. All therefore will, but through Adam's fall it happens that our will is depraved and rebellious against God: will, I say, remains in us, but it is enslaved and bound by sin. Whence then comes an upright will? Even from regeneration by the Spirit. Hence the Spirit does not confer on us the faculty of willing: for it is inherent to us from our birth, that is, it is hereditary, and a part of the creation which could not be blotted out by Adam's fall; but when the will is in us, God gives us to will rightly, and this is his work. Besides, when it is said that he gives us the power of willing, this is not understood generally, because it ought not to be extended to the bad as well as to the good; but when Paul is treating of the salvation of men, he deservedly assigns to God our willing uprightly. We now understand what the Prophet's words signify, and it seems that he denotes perseverance when he says, *that they may walk in my precepts, and keep my judgments and do them.* the whole matter had been explained in one word, *that they may walk in my statutes:* but because men always sinfully consider how they may lessen the grace of God, and by sacrilegious boldness endeavor to draw to themselves what belongs to him; therefore that. the Prophet may better exclude all pride, he says that we must attribute to God the walking in his precepts, preserving his statutes, and obeying his whole law. Hence let us leave entirely his own praise to God, and thus acknowledge that in our good works nothing is our own; and especially in perseverance, let us reckon it God's singular gift: and this is surely necessary, if we consider how very weak we are, and with how many and what violent attacks Satan continually urges us. First of all, we may easily fall every moment, unless God sustain us: and then the thrusts of Satan by far exceed our strength. If therefore we consider our condition without the grace of God, we shall confess that in our good works the only part which is ours is the fault, as also Augustine wisely makes this exception: for it is sufficiently known that no work is so praiseworthy as not to be sprinkled with some fault. Neither do the duties which we discharge proceed from a perfect love of God, but we have always to wrestle that we may obey him. We seem then to contaminate our deeds by this defect. There is then in our good works that very thing which vitiates them, so that they are deservedly rejected before God. But when we treat of uprightness and praise, we must learn to leave to God what is his own, lest we wish to be partakers in sacrilege.

Now it follows, *and they shall be my people, and I will be their God* Under these words the Prophet doubtless includes that gratuitous pardon by which God reconciles sinners to himself. And truly, it would not be sufficient for us to be renewed in obedience to God's righteousness unless his paternal indulgence, by which he pardons our infirmities, is added. This is expressed more

clearly by Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 31:33,) and by our Prophet, (Jeremiah 36:25-27,) but it is the mark of a Scripture phrase. For as often as God promises the sons of Abraham that they should be his people, that promise has no other foundation than in his gratuitous covenant which contains the forgiveness of sins. Hence it is as if the Prophet had added, that God would expiate all the faults of his people. For our safety is contained in these two members, that God follows us with his paternal favor, while he bears with us, and does not call us up for judgment, but buries our sins, as is said in Psalm 32:1, 2, Blessed is the man to whom God does not impute his iniquities.

It follows, on the other side, that all are wretched and accursed to whom he does impute them. If any one object, that we have no need of pardon when we do not sin, the answer is easy, that the faithful are never so regenerated as to fulfill the law of God. They aspire to keep his commands, and that too with a serious and sincere affection; but because some defects always remain, therefore they are guilty, and their guilt cannot be blotted out otherwise than by expiation when God pardons them. But we know that there were under the law rites prescribed for expiating their sins: this was the meaning of sprinkling by water and the pouring out of blood; but we know that these ceremonies were of no value in themselves, except as far as they directed the people's faith to Christ. Hence, whenever our salvation is treated of, let these two things be remembered, that we cannot be reckoned God's sons unless he freely expiate our sins, and thus reconcile himself to us: and then not unless he also rule us by his Spirit. Now we must hold, that what God hath joined man ought not to separate. Those, therefore, who through relying on the indulgence of God permit themselves to give way to sin, rend his covenant and impiously sever it. Why so? because God has joined these two things together, viz., that he will be propitious to his sons, and will also renew their hearts. Hence those who lay hold of only one member of the sentence, namely, the pardon, because God bears with them, and omit the other, are as false and sacrilegious as if they abolished half of God's covenant. Therefore we must hold what I have said, namely, that under these words reconciliation is pointed out, by which it happens that God does not impute their sins to his own. Lastly, let us remark that the whole perfection of our salvation has been placed in this, if God reckons us among his people. As it is said in Psalm 33:12,

“Happy is the people to whom Jehovah is their God.”

There solid happiness is described, namely, when God deems any people worthy of this honor of belonging peculiarly to himself. Only let him be propitious to us, and then we shall not be anxious, because our salvation is secure. It follows —

Ezekiel 11:21

21. But *as for them* whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominationurn ²⁴⁰ et spurcitarum ipserum, viam abominations, I will recompense their way upon corum in caput ipsorum rependam, dicit their own heads, saith the Lord GOD. **21.** Et quorum cor pergit ²³⁹ ad cor Dominator Iehovah.

²³⁹ Or, “walks.” — Calvin.

²⁴⁰ “Foulness.” — Calvin.

The phrase which the Prophet uses is indeed harsh: he says, *their heart goes after heart*, so that some interpret this of imitation: namely, since God promises that he will be an avenger if any of the people conduct themselves after bad examples and unite in alliance with the wicked, just as if they glued together their hearts and affections, but that is harsh. The repetition is therefore superfluous, and the Prophet means nothing else than that God will be avenged if the Israelites follow their own heart, so as to walk in their own foulness and abominations. First of all we must understand the reason why the Prophet uses this sentiment. God had liberally poured out the treasures of his mercy, but since, hypocrites have always been mixed with the good, at the same time that they confidently boast themselves members of the Church, and use the name of God with great audacity; so that the Prophet uses this threat that they may not think all the promises which we hear of to belong to themselves promiscuously. For there were always many reprobate among the elect people, because not all who sprang from father Abraham were true Israelites. (Romans 9:6, 7.)

Since therefore it was so, the Prophet properly shows here that what he had previously promised was peculiar to God's elect, and to the true and lawful members of the Church, but not to the spurious, nor to the degenerate, nor to those who are unregenerated by the true and incorruptible seed. This is the Prophet's intention. But lest there might seem to be too much rigor when God, as it were, armed comes down into the midst to destroy all who do not repent, the Prophet here declares their crime — namely, because *their heart walks after their heart*, that is, thine heart draws itself, and so the word heart is twice repeated. It is indeed a superfluous repetition but emphatic, when he says, that the heart of those who so pertinaciously adhere to their own superstitions is then impelled by its own self to new motions, so that by its continual tenor it goes always towards superstitions. Hence I will be an avenger, says God. Hence as often as God proposes to us testimonies of his favor, let each descend into himself and examine all his affections. But when any one lays hold of his own vices let him not please himself in them, but rather groan over them, and strive to renounce his own affections that he may follow God: neither let him harden himself in obstinacy, so that his heart may not proceed and rush continually towards evil, as is here said.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since we have utterly perished in our father Adam, and there remains in us no single part which is not corrupt, whilst we carry material for wrath, and cursing, and death, as well in the soul as in the body, that being regenerated by the Spirit, we may more and more withdraw ourselves from our own will and our own spirit, and so submit ourselves to thee, that thy Spirit may truly reign within us: And afterwards, grant that we may not be ungrateful, but considering how inestimable is this benefit, may we dedicate our whole life and apply ourselves to glorify thy name, in Jesus Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE THIRTY FIRST,

Ezekiel 11:22-23

22. Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel *was* over them above.

22. Et sustulerunt cherubim alas suas, et rotae e regione ipsorum: et gloria Dei Israel super ipsos sursum.

23. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which *is* on the east side of the city.

23. Et ascendit gloria Iehovae e medio urbis, et stetit super montem qui est ab oriente urbis.

Here Ezekiel repeats what we saw before, namely, that God as he had chosen Mount Zion had at length rejected it, because that place had been polluted by the many wickednesses of the people. The Jews fancied that God was, as it were, held captive among them, and in this confidence they gave themselves up to licentiousness. Hence the Prophet shows them that God was not so bound to them as not to go wherever he pleased, and what is more, he announces that he has migrated, and that the temple is deprived of his glory. This indeed was almost incredible. For since God had pro-raised to dwell there perpetually, (Psalm 132:14,) his faithful ones could scarcely suppose that he would neglect his promise, and desert the temple which he had chosen. But this interruption does not interfere with his promise, which was always true and firm. God, therefore, did not entirely desert Mount Zion, because the opposite promise concerning his return must be kept. Since then the exile was temporary, and the temple was to be restored after seventy years, these points may be reconciled: namely, that God departed from it and yet the place remained sacred, so that after the lapse of that time which God had previously determined, his worship should be restored again in the temple and on Mount Zion. But he says, that God *had visibly gone out of the city and the cherubim also*: that is, that God was borne above the wings of the cherubim, as also the scripture elsewhere says: and he does this, because the Jews were governed by external symbols, and when the ark of the covenant was shut up in the sanctuary, no one could be persuaded that God could be torn away from it. With this view the Prophet says, *The cherubim had flown away elsewhere, and that at the same time God was carried upon their wings* Now he adds —

Ezekiel 11:24

24. Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldaeam ad captivitatem, in *visione*, in Spiritu Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me.

24. Et Spiritus sustulit me, et reduxit me in Chaldaeam ad captivitatem, in *visione*, in Spiritu Dei. Et ascendit desuper me ²⁴¹ visio quam videram.

Let us add also the next verse —

²⁴¹ That is, “left me.” — Calvin.

Ezekiel 11:25

25. Then I spake unto them of the captivity **25.** Et locutus sum captivitati cunctos
all the things that the LORD had shewed me. sermones Iehovae, quos mihi ostenderat. ²⁴²

The Prophet here confirms what he had said at the beginning, viz., that this vision was divinely presented and was not an empty and deceptive specter. This prophecy was difficult of belief, so that all doubt ought to be removed, lest any one should object that God was not the author of the vision. He says, therefore, *that he was raised up by the Spirit of God and brought into Chaldea*. We have already asserted, that the Prophet did not change his place, though I am unwilling to contend for this, if any one think otherwise. But still it appears to me, that when the Prophet remained in exile he saw Jerusalem and the other places about which he discourses, not humanly but by a prophetic spirit. As then he had been carried to Jerusalem by the Spirit, so was he brought back into exile. But Spirit is here opposed to nature, since we know that our prospect is limited within a definite space. Now if the least obstacle occur our sight will not pass over five or six paces. But when God's Spirit illuminates us, a new faculty begins to flourish in us, which is by no means to be estimated naturally. We now see in what sense Ezekiel says, *that he was brought back into Chaldea by the Spirit of God*, because he was in truth like a man in an ecstasy. For he had been carried out of himself, but now he is left in his ordinary state. And this is the meaning of these words, *in a vision in the Spirit of God* For a vision is opposed to a reality. For if the Prophet had been brought back by a vision, it follows that he had not really been at Jerusalem so as to be brought back into Chaldea. Now he meets the question which may be moved, viz.: "What was the efficacy of the vision?" For the Prophet recalls us to the power of the Spirit which we must not measure by our rule. Since, therefore, the operation of the Spirit is incomprehensible, we need not wonder that the Prophet was carried to Jerusalem in a vision, and afterwards brought back into captivity. He adds *that the vision departed from him*, by which words he commends his own doctrine, and extols it beyond all mortal speeches, because he separates between what was human in himself and what was divine when he says, *the vision departed from me*. Hence the Prophet wishes himself to be considered as twofold: that is, as a private man, and but one of many, for in this capacity he had no authority as if he was to be heard in God's stead. But when the Spirit acted upon him, he wished to withdraw himself from the number of men, because he did not speak of himself, nor treat of anything human, or in a human manner, but the Spirit of God so flourished in him that he uttered nothing but what was celestial and divine.

Afterwards he says, *that he spoke all those words to the captives*, or exiles. This passage seems superfluous. For to what purpose had the Prophet been taught concerning the destruction of the city, the overthrow of the kingdom, and the ruin of the temple, unless to induce the Jews who still remained in the country to desist from their superstition? But we must remember that the Prophet had a hard contest with those exiles among whom he dwelt, as will more clearly appear in the next chapter. For as the Jews boasted that they remained safe, and laughed at the captives who had suffered themselves to be drawn away into a distant land, so the exiles were weary of their miseries. For their condition was very sorrowful when they saw themselves exposed to every reproach, and

²⁴² "Which he had made me see." — Calvin

treated by the Chaldeans servilely and insultingly. Since, then, this was their condition, they roared among themselves and were indignant, since they had to bear the manners of the Prophets, and especially Jeremiah. Since, therefore, the captives repented of their lot, it was needful for the Prophet to restrain their contumely. And this is the meaning of the words *that he related the words of Jehovah to the captives*. Nor was this admonition less needful for the exiles, than for the Jews who as yet remained safe in the city. He says, *the words which God caused him to see*, improperly, but very appositely to the sense; for not only had God spoken, but he had placed the thing itself before the eyes of the Prophet. Hence we see why he says, *that words had been shown to him that he might behold them* I have already said that this language is improper for words, because it applies to the sight, for eyes do not receive words, but cars. But here the Prophet signifies that it was not the naked and simple word of God, but clothed in an external symbol. Augustine says that a sacrament is a word made visible, and he speaks correctly; because in baptism God addresses our eyes, when he brings forward water as a symbol of our ablution and regeneration. In the Supper also he directs his speech to our eyes, since Christ shows his flesh to us as truly food, and his blood as truly drink, when bread and wine are set before us. For this reason also the Prophet now says, *that he saw the word of God*, because it was clothed in outward symbols. For God appeared to his Prophet, as I have said, and showed him the temple, and there erected a theater, as it were, in which he beheld the whole state of the city Jerusalem.²⁴³ Let us go on —

²⁴³ See Augustine's Homily on John, 89, bk. 19, *com. Faust.* Calvin, as well as other Commentators, often felt great difficulty in separating the human element from the divine, while interpreting the Prophets. He has expressed it feelingly while interpreting this last verse of the eleventh chapter. It is confessedly most difficult to draw the line rigidly between the direct agency of God and the subservient instrumentality of man. The spiritual teaching delivered by the Prophets evidently needed some visible and tangible means of conveyance to the outward senses of the recipients; but who shall mark off any palpable boundary between spirit and grace — the mind of God, and the regenerated mind of the Prophet? If there are no harsh transitions and sudden breaks in the natural world, so in the spiritual and moral, the limits between the essentially divine and the clearly human are at present untraceable by mortal vision. As the revelations to Ezekiel were progressive, differing in immediate character and object, so together with them something extrinsic was needed, to become a suitable vehicle for the majesty and purity of the truth conveyed. Neither the Prophet nor his countrymen could bear the naked effulgence of the divine messages; they were too luminous and dazzling for their sin-burdened souls, and thus they needed a condescending adaptation to their many infirmities. The pure and colorless water of life, instinct though it be with the spirit of Deity, comes to us tinctured with the peculiarity of the earthen vessel through which it flows. Our attention ought often to be drawn to this while reading Ezekiel. The Almighty not only condescends to his infirmities, but to those of the captives among whom he dwelt, so that the pure light of prophetic manifestation becomes tinged in passing through a two-fold medium, before it reaches us, among "the isles of the Gentiles." And while we cannot give the reader any formal rules for testing the soundness of Calvin's interpretations, we must appeal to that sound mind, that cultivated scholarship, and that Christian tact, which is the result of experience, in discriminating between the chaff and the wheat. Ordinary faculties, chastened by severe and patient study, combined with holy and Christian views of Divine truth as a whole, will suffice for deciding on such abstruse questions with a sufficient degree of precision and correctness.

CHAPTER 12

Ezekiel 12:1-2

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| <p>1. The word of the LORD also came unto me, saying,</p> <p>2. Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they <i>are</i> a rebellious house.</p> | <p>1. Et fuit sermo Iehovae ad me dicendo,</p> <p>2. Fili hominis, in medio domus rebellis tu habitas, oculi illis ad videndum, et non vident: aures illis ad audiendum, et non audiunt: quia domus rebellis ipsi. ²⁴⁴</p> |
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Because God was about to give a command to his servant, he wished to inspire him with fortitude of mind, lest, when he saw that he was consuming his labor in vain, he should withdraw from his course. For we know how severe is that temptation to God's servants when they speak to the deaf, and not only is their doctrine rejected but even refused with ignominy. They think, therefore, that nothing is better than silence, because where their word is so despised it only exposes the name of God to the reproaches of the impious. Now then we understand for what purpose God admonishes his Prophet about the contumacy of the nation. The Prophet had tried enough, and more than enough, how unmanageable the Israelites were, but God confirms by his judgment what the Prophet had discovered sufficiently in practice. Then we must observe another reason, for God not only commanded his Prophet what to say, but he added an outward symbol, as we shall see. But the Prophet might object, that it would be ridiculous to take a staff, and scrip, and hat, as a traveler about to commence a journey. Nor is it doubtful that the Israelites derided through perverseness what he was doing, as a boyish amusement.

Lest, therefore, the Prophet should think what he was commanded to do absurd, God instructs him, and gives him the reason of his plan. He says, therefore, *the house of Israel is rebellious*, and then he expresses the greatness of their contumacy, namely, *that they are deaf, though endued with ears: that they are blind, and yet do not want eyes* God here shows that the Israelites could not defend their error, as if they had sinned without consideration; but he assigns their neither hearing nor seeing to their obstinacy. And this must be diligently remarked, because hypocrites, when convicted, catch as much as possible at this excuse, that they fell through error or ignorance. But God on the contrary here pronounces that the Israelites were blind and deaf, and shows that their blindness was voluntary. When, therefore, unbelievers pretend that they have not been illuminated by the Lord, it may be conceded to them that they are blind and deaf: but we must often proceed beyond this, since their own obstinacy is the fountain of their blindness and deafness: and God blinds them, because they will not admit the light offered them, but stop their ears. In God's judgments, indeed, the causes do not always appear, for we sometimes see a whole nation minded without any reason apparent to us; but as far as the ten tribes are concerned, there can be no excuse for their error, since they were brought up from childhood in God's law, so that their pride and contempt caused God to reject them. Hence they were so stupified that they neither saw with their eyes nor heard with their ears. And this the Prophet expresses significantly, *they hear not*, says he,

²⁴⁴ That is, "they are." — Calvin.

since they are a rebellious house; he does not say, because their senses do not penetrate to the secrets of God, are not sufficiently acute, are not endued with such great prudence; but *because they are a rebellious house*, that is, because they have stupified themselves. Hence it happens that they neither hear nor see. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:3

3. Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee 3. Et tu fili hominis, fac ²⁴⁵ tibi vasa stuff for removing, and remove by day in their transmigrationis: et transmigra interdiu in oculis sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to ipsorum: migrabis autem a loco tuo ad locum another place in their sight: it may be they will alium in oculis ipsorum, si forte videant, quia consider, though they *be* a rebellious house. domus rebellis strut.

Now God instructs his Prophet in what he wishes him to do: he orders him to take vessels for journeying, that is, he orders him to prepare for a long journey, even for exile: for exile is the subject here. But he who is compelled to leave home to go into a foreign land, collects whatever he can carry with him, namely, his clothes, shoes, hat, scrip, and staff, and other things of that kind, if he have even a little money. Therefore the Prophet is advised to gird himself for his journey, by which he represents the character of those who were just about to be dragged into exile. For this reason he is ordered *to prepare for himself vessels for traveling* The Latins call garments as well as other goods “vessels:” whence proverbially to collect goods is to remove baggage in a military phrase, or to take away one’s stuff. But he orders this *to be done in the day-time*, that the Israelites may see what is done.

Then the Prophet is ordered *to remove from one place to another* As I have said, this might appear puerile. Cicero describes those legal fictions, ²⁴⁶ how those who went to law about a field when called upon to plead, had, so to speak, an imaginary way of going to see it; for since it was too troublesome to the judge to mount his horse and ride over various fields, they retained an ancient and customary ceremony: the plaintiff said, the land which you say is yours, I claim for myself and say is mine, and if you wish to dispute with me legally, I summon you to the spot: the defendant replied, as you summon me there, I in return answer your summons. The judge then arose and moved from his place, and so an imaginary action took place. Cicero derides that by-play, and says it is unworthy of the gravity of a court of law. But such was the action of the Prophet; he took his hat, cloak, staff, and shoes, and other things, and changed his place as if he were moving. But he only went a short distance. But God previously had said, that he was dealing with a perverse nation, and so had need of such assistances. And we must remark the particle, *if by chance they should see, because they are a rebellious house* For here God as it were suspends the event of his teaching, when he says, *if perhaps they should hear* And the reason is added, because the hardness of the people was so great, that they could scarcely be turned to obedience by any discourses or signs.

²⁴⁵ Or, “prepare.” — Calvin.

²⁴⁶ *Orat. pro Murcena*, sect. 12, page 129; and Edit. Lond. 1819, tom. 2, page 760. It is needless to quote the passage, as Calvin’s allusion to it is sufficiently copious, and the reader will readily perceive how our own obsolete law forms are open to the same objection, and illustrate the text in a similar way.

Meanwhile let us learn from this place, that we must still go on, although success does not answer to our labor, when we spend our strength for God. And this instruction is peculiarly necessary, because when God imposes on us any duty, we dispute with ourselves as to its result, and thus all energy flags, because we are seldom willing to put forth a finger unless we perceive a prosperous issue. Because, therefore, we are always too attentive to the fruit of our labor, hence this passage should be diligently regarded, when God sends his Prophet and yet adds, *if by chance they should listen*. Whatever may be the event, we must obey God; if our labor should not profit, yet God wishes us to obey him. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:4

4. Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day 4. Et effer vasa tanquam vasa captivitatis in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt interdiu in oculis ipsorum: et tu egredieris vespere go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth in oculis ipsorum secundum egressus captivitatis. into captivity.

The other verses must now be added —

Ezekiel 12:5-6

5. Dig thou through the wall in their sight, 5. In oculis ipsorum perfodies tibi parietem, and carry out thereby. et educes per ipsum.

6. In their sight shalt thou bear *it* upon *thy* 6. In oculis ipsorum super humerum gestabis, shoulders, *and* carry *it* forth in the twilight: thou in tenebris egredieris; faciem tuam occultabis et shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: non aspicies terram, quia portentum constitui to for I have set thee *for* a sign unto the house of domui Israel. Israel.

Ezekiel is verbose in this narration. But in the beginning of the book we said, that because the teacher was sent to men very slow and stupid, he therefore used a rough style. We added also, that he had acquired it partly from the custom of the region in which he dwelt. For the people declined by degrees from the polish of their language, and hence it happens that the Prophet's diction is not quite pure, but is intermixed with something foreign. As to the subject itself there is no ambiguity, since God repeats *that he should dig through a wall, and bring out his vessels by himself before their eyes*. Here follows another part of the vision, namely, that there should be no free egress but that the Jews would desire to depart by stealth. First, therefore, it is shown to the Prophet, that the Jews who when secure at Jerusalem boasted that all was well with them, should be exiles; then, that it would not be in their power to go forth when they wished, unless perhaps they stealthily *escaped* the hands of the enemy through their hiding-place, as thieves escape by digging through a wall. Then the application will follow, but yet it was worth while to state what God intended by

this vision. Afterwards everything is embraced. *In their sight*, says he, *thou shalt bear upon thy shoulder*, that is, thou shalt be prepared and girt for a journey *as a traveler*, and *this shall be done in the day-time: but in darkness*, says he, *thou shalt bring them forth: after thy vessels have been prepared, wait for the evening: in the darkness afterwards thou shalt go forth*. Here he shows what I have already touched upon, when necessity expelled the Jews from their country, that their departure would not be free, because they would be well off if they could snatch themselves away from the sight of their enemies in hiding-places and the darkness of the night.

He adds, *thou shalt hide thy face*, and the clause, *neither shalt thou look upon the earth*, means the same thing. Anxiety and trembling is marked by this phrase, as when he says, *thou shalt hide thy face*, it signifies that the Jews should be so perplexed that they should fear every event which happened. For those who fear everything veil their faces, as is well known. But this trembling is better expressed when he says, *thou shalt not look upon the earth*. For those who are in haste do not dare to bend down their eyes the least in either one direction or another, but are carried along to the place to which they are going, and press forward with their eyes, because they cannot hasten with their feet as quickly as they desire. Hence they seize their way, as it were, with their eyes. This is the reason why God says, *thou shalt not look upon the earth, because I have set thee*, says he, *for a sign to the house of Israel*. Here God meets the petulance of those who otherwise would laugh at what the Prophet was doing: what do you mean by that fictitious emigration? why do you not rest at home? why do you here frighten us with an empty spectacle? God, therefore, that the Jews should not obstinately despise what he shows them, adds, *that the Prophet was a sign or a wonder to the house of Israel*. The word wonder is here taken in its genuine sense, though sometimes it has an unfavorable meaning. We say that anything portentous is disagreeable: but a “portent” properly designates any sign of the future. When therefore men predict what is hidden, it is called a portent. And this is the meaning of Isaiah, (Isaiah 8:18,) where he says, Behold me, and the children whom God has given me, for signs and wonders. He puts *athoth*, “signs,” in the first place, then *mophthim*, “portents.” Here the Prophet speaks in the singular: *I have given thee for a wonder*. But since Isaiah treats of the rest of the faithful, he then uses signs and portents; since Isaiah seems to imply something more, namely, that the people were so stupid that they so feared and abhorred God’s servants, as if they had met, with a prodigy. Here, therefore, the depravity of the people is to be marked, because when they saw any pious and sincere worshipper of God they turned away their eyes as from a formidable prodigy. But now the Prophet speaks simply, that *he had been placed for a prodigy to the house of Israel*: because in truth this action was a presage of that future captivity which the Jews did not fear for themselves, and which was also incredible to the Israelites; whence that penitence and weariness of which I have spoken. But I do not object if any think that the Prophet speaks of a portent, because the Israelites were struck with astonishment; but the former sense is far more apposite. In this way then God distinguishes the action of the Prophet from all empty spectacles, and so vindicates his servant from all opprobrium. Meanwhile he signifies that although the Prophet was despised, yet that he would be true, and at the same time the avenger of contempt. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:7

7. And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for fueram, vasa mea eduxi tanquam vasa captivitatis captivity, and in the even I digged through the interdiu: et vespere perfodi in parletem ²⁴⁷ manu; wall with mine hand; I brought *it* forth in the in tenebris eduxi, super humerum extuli ²⁴⁸ in twilight, *and* I bare *it* upon *my* shoulder in their oculis ipsorum. sight.

Here the Prophet relates that he had executed what God had commanded: nor did it escape him that this action would be exposed to many jeers and reproaches. But he esteemed nothing of equal moment with pleasing God: hence we must remark the Prophet's alacrity in executing God's commands. For since to ingenuous natures nothing is more distasteful than *reproach*, he might *reject* the burden imposed upon him, because it provoked the laughter of all men. But because God was otherwise pleased he did as he was ordered. He says, therefore, *that he carried away his vessels, as it were vessels of captivity*, or of migration, and that in the day-time: as if he said that he had prepared whatever was necessary for the journey, as if he saw that a long march, even exile was before him. This then was the reason why he prepared his goods in the day-time. Now it follows, *at evening he dug through the wall* This belongs to the second clause, that the Israelites might understand that all egress was blocked up to the Jews, so that no safety remained but in concealed flight. He says also, *by the hand*, whence it appears to be done suddenly and tumultuously. He says, *that he went out in darkness, and carried things on his shoulder* — *namely*, that he may confirm what we have so often said, that the Jews had no hope of safety except under cover of the night: because they were besieged on every side, and could not move on one side or the other, lest the enemy should seize them. This is the reason why the Prophet says, *that he went out in darkness through the wall which had been dug through*

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou so wishest us to live in this world, that we may travel onwards till thou gatherest us into thy heavenly rest, that we may truly contemplate that eternal inheritance, and apply to it all our endeavors: and next, that we may so travel in this world that we may not wander nor stray from the way; but being always intent on the mark which thou settest before us, grant us to proceed on our way, until we finish our course, and enjoy that glory which thine only-begotten Son has prepared for us through his own blood. — Amen.

LECTURE THIRTY-SECOND

²⁴⁷ Verbally, "but I dug through a wall for myself." — Calvin.

²⁴⁸ Or, "I carried forth." — Calvin.

Ezekiel 12:8-11

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| 8. And in the morning came the word of the LORD unto me, saying, | 8. Et fuit sermo Iehovae ad me mane, dicendo, |
| 9. Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest Israel, ²⁴⁹ thou? | 9. Fili hominis, an non dixerunt tibi, domus rebellis, ²⁴⁹ Quid tu facis? |
| 10. Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; This burden <i>concerneth</i> the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that <i>are</i> among them. | 10. Dic illis, sic dicit Dominator Iehova, Principis onus hoc ²⁵⁰ in Ierusalem, et totius domus Israel quae in medio ipsorum. |
| 11. Say, I <i>am</i> your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove, and go into captivity. | 11. Dic eis, Ego portentum vestrum sicuti feci, ita fiet illis, in transmigrationem, in caprivitatem ibunt. |

We gather from these words of the Prophet, that he was himself derided when he began to migrate: then that he dug through the wall by night secretly, and thus carried away his baggage. For those who think that the Israelites enquired about this, as if it were unknown to them, do not sufficiently consider the Prophet's words. For the repetition of the epithet *rebellious house* is not in vain; for if this question had proceeded from mere folly, God would not have called them rebellious. This epithet, then, refers to the present passage, and thus we may determine that the Israelites asked the Prophet deridingly, what does this mean? For he seemed to them to be trifling, and thus they jeered at him; for we know the audacity of the nation in despising their Prophets. It is not, then, to be wondered at, when they obtained a plausible ground for it, if they commented rather freely upon what the Prophet was doing. We said yesterday 'that this seemed a childish spectacle. Hence the Israelites seemed, not without reason, to reject what the Prophet was doing as a thing of nought. But God does not suffer his servants to be reviled in this way. He now signified to the Prophet that his calling ought to be deservedly held sacred. Since therefore Ezekiel bore certain marks of the prophetic office, although at first sight his conduct could not appear serious, yet the people ought to have enquired modestly. For whatever we know to flow from God should be reverently received without controversy. But if there is any obscurity we may wonder and enquire into it; but as I have said, docility and modesty ought always to precede. But what did the Israelites do? they enquired, indeed, the meaning of the Prophet's conduct, but only to reject it with ridicule. For this reason God is angry, and announces himself a severe avenger of that audacity, because they persecuted the sacred Prophet. Hence this must be read emphatically — *what doest thou?* as if they said that the Prophet was foolish, and carried and prepared his goods, and dug through the wall, in vain, since all these things were of no moment. But the answer, when it shows that God is greatly offended with such trifling, sufficiently demonstrates that they did not ask the question through ignorance, or want of thought, but through mere wantonness.

²⁴⁹ Or, as we have elsewhere said, "exasperating," or "bitter." — Calvin.

²⁵⁰ "This sorrowful prophecy." — Calvin.

He now says, *this prophecy relates to the prince, and the whole house of Israel which is in the midst of them*. Without doubt he understands the king, as we shall soon see: nor does he speak of any king indefinitely, but points out Zedekiah, as will be immediately evident from circumstances. He says, therefore, *this burden*, or this sorrowful prophecy, *looks towards the prince, and to the house of Israel*, which dwell at Jerusalem. But it is probable that some had fled that they might not fall into the hands of the enemy, since Jerusalem was a safe receptacle for them. The captives thought themselves bad managers, because they had not followed those leaders, since Jerusalem was a safe refuge for them, and hence the greater sorrow at their captivity. Hence God pronounces that the Israelites were comprehended with their king in this prophecy. It is indeed true that this was a common name to all the posterity of Abraham; for the twelve tribes sprung from the patriarch Jacob, but it was then becoming customary for the ten tribes to retain the name of Israel, and for that of Judah to have their own proper and peculiar name. Afterwards he confirms his teaching, *that he was as a sign to them*. We explained this expression yesterday, showing how the Prophet was placed before them as a sign, so that God represented what was as yet unknown to them; for signs divinely sent are called portents, when they foretell what no one would expect to happen. God, indeed, often shows what he is going to do by many, yet ordinary signs; but an extraordinary one, which cannot be considered natural, is called a portent. So therefore the Prophet is ordered to say to the Israelites *that he was to them for a wonder*, namely, to reprove their obstinacy, which, as we have said, was the cause of their impious contempt. For it was no part of their religion for a Prophet to deride them, so that they should suppose him to be trifling with them, as if frightening children about nothing. God, therefore, that the Israelites might at length be roused up at his own time, pronounces his servant to be a wonder to them. And we gather from the reason which is added, what the name portent meant in yesterday's lecture. For he says, *as I have done, so shall it be done to you*; that is, what you now think to be child's play, shall be seriously fulfilled in yourselves. For the Prophet seemed to act a part, like a player, and on this account was derided. He now declares that it should not be fabulous, since the Israelites, who were left in Judea among the Jews, and the king himself, should not act a part; for God would compel them to collect their baggage, and to take flight by stealth in the darkness of the night, which he follows up through the whole verse. *Into banishment and exile*, says he, *shall they go*. When therefore the Prophet was commanded to collect and prepare his goods, he was a sign of the exile of which he now speaks. But the explanation of the second part is added.

Ezekiel 12:12

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| <p>12. And the prince that <i>is</i> among them shall bear upon <i>his</i> shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with <i>his</i> eyes.</p> | <p>12. Et princeps qui in medio ipsorum est super humerum portabit in tenebris, et ingredietur in pariete quem effoderint ad educendum ²⁵¹ ipso: faciem suam occultabit, ne (<i>ut non</i>) aspiciat oculo terram.</p> |
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²⁵¹ Or, "for carrying out." — Calvin.

We have said that two things were shown, both the people's exile and their clandestine flight: the Prophet now speaks again about this trembling. He says therefore, that not only the vulgar and the dregs of the people would be so anxious that they would endeavor to escape secretly and carry their own baggage; but *the prince himself*, that is, their king would be subject to such ignominy: *the prince himself*, says he, *shall carry on his shoulder*. Many followed him, as we have seen, and at length he was seized with a great company, as the Prophet will shortly subjoin, and being' caught in the desert of Jericho, he was dragged by the enemy before their king: but here mention is made of the king alone, because it was almost incredible that the enemy could not be reconciled. For surrender often appeases even the most hostile enemies; it often preserves kings, although an extended carnage may take place; and we know that kings are often preserved on account of their dignity, after they have been led in triumph. What therefore the Prophet pronounces concerning king Zedekiah does not imply any escape of the multitude from similar punishment: but because the king himself, together with his subjects in general, would be compelled to escape by stealth, and would be sure to fall into the hands of the enemy.

Next, *the prince who is in the midst of them* Here the words, *the midst of them*, are taken in a different sense from that in which the Israelites were lately said to be in the midst of the people who inhabited Jerusalem, because they had been mixed with the Jews from the time when they had dwelt within their territories. But he says *their prince was in the midst* in another sense, because in truth the eyes of all were turned towards him, as if when a standard is erected, it is beheld by all, and retains the whole multitude in their ranks, so also *the king was in the midst*, that the people might not disperse, for a miserable dispersion follows when the head is taken away. But the intention of the Holy Spirit must be observed. For the Jews, as we have formerly seen, were hardened in their wickedness by the false pretense that God would always maintain his dwelling among them. For it had been said of the throne of David, that it should stand as long as the sun and moon should shine in the heavens. (Psalm 89:36, 37.) And hence Jeremiah's lamentable complaint: the Christ, or anointed of God, in whose breath our life consisted. (Lamentations 4:20.) The Prophet does not speak there after the usual mode, and obtrusively remind God of his promise, as hypocrites do, but he has respect to God's counsel. For David, since he was a type of Christ, was truly the soul of the people, even among the Gentiles, as he is there reckoned to be. For they not only looked to their king for safety while included within the city walls, but although dispersed among the nations, they still hoped to be safe under their monarch's shadow. But their confidence was perverse, since they had impiously departed from the true worship of God. Hence the Prophet, to deprive them of that vain source of pride and boasting, says, *now their king was in the midst of them*: but it would not always be so, for God would drive him out, and even compel him to fly into secret hiding-places.

He afterwards adds, *he shall hide his face, that he shall not see the ground with his eyes* This also was accomplished, the sacred history narrates. For Zedekiah escaped through the gardens by subterraneous passages: he thought the enemy would be ignorant of his flight, but he was seized. (2 Kings 25:4, 5; and Jeremiah 39:4, 5.) We see, then, the meaning of this concealment of his face or countenance, namely, because Zedekiah distrusted any he might meet. But this was very bitter, and also base and disgraceful, for a king so to conceal himself, and not to dare to look upon the ground with his eyes. And now something far more disastrous follows.

Ezekiel 12:13

13. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon, *to* the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.

13. Et extendam rete meum super ipsum, et capietur in plagis meis, ²⁵² et educam eum *inquit* Babylonem in terrain Chaldaee, et ipsam non videbit, et illic morietur.

That was no slight slaughter, when Zedekiah at length, in his desperation, thought of flight, and thus descended into hidden trenches, as if seeking life in the tomb: thus was he reduced to extremities. But the Prophet now adds, that it would be useless, *because notwithstanding this he should be taken by his enemies*. Besides, what God executed by means of the Chaldeans he properly transfers to himself. The Chaldeans laid their snares when advised of the king's flight: they knew its direction, and hence they apprehended him. So God announces himself as the author: I, says he, *will stretch out my net*. This we know, that the Chaldeans did not leave their own country of their own accord, nor carry on the war in their own strength, nor take the king by their own counsel; but the whole affair was under the government of heaven. Men lent their aid, and seemed to carry on the work by their own labor; but unless God had provided for the event, all their endeavors had proved fruitless. Hence, as God had stirred up the Chaldeans to exact punishment from the king and the people, so he raised their minds to confidence, then he strengthened them to persist in the siege of the city, and afterwards opened their eyes, and sent persons to disclose the plans of the king, so that he might be seized in a cave, as it really happened. The whole of this was done by the secret providence of God. So diligently ought we to observe those places in which God shows that what seems to be the work of men is really his own. Even likeness does not want its weight; for we seem always to have some refuge in perplexity, and on whatever side we look around, some hope deceives us. But God announces that he has *nets spread*, by which we are surrounded on every side: hence when we seem to have a way of escape, God has hidden nets in which he encloses us. So that this place compares God to a hunter, and ourselves to wild beasts; for when a huntsman follows wild beasts, they seek for a way of escape and rush out there, but they are caught in nets: so also when we endeavor to elude God's hands, we are entrapped and held by him: because when we wish to withdraw ourselves from his providence, we deserve that blindness which leads us to rush on our own destruction.

Hence *I will spread my net for him, and he shall be taken in my snares, I will lead him away*, says he, *to Babylon*. The Prophet shows by degrees how formidably God's vengeance should alight on Zedekiah and the whole people. It was already most miserable to be taken by the enemy and subjected to their lust and cruelty. If he had been slain, this would have been accomplished in a single moment, but God wished him to be drawn into exile; meanwhile he says that he should die at Babylon, without seeing the city, both of which were accomplished. Zedekiah then wasted away in exile, for he lay even to his death in filth and defilement. And although he was buried, as we saw in Jeremiah, yet this condition was most sorrowful — to fear through one's whole lifetime some fresh wrath of an enemy. Then he was barbarously and inhumanly treated: his eyes were put

²⁵² "In nets," some translate "a drag-net," but erroneously, and this has given rise to mistake, because some have thought the similitude derived from fishes, while it is clear that the same thing is indicated by different words: he shall be taken therefore in my net. — *Calvin*.

out on the journey; and here it is said, *he shall not see Babylon*, and yet he shall arrive there *and die* there. Afterwards he saw his sons strangled in his sight: then his eyes were dug out — a spectacle more grievous than death. Now we may reflect on the kind of life a man must spend in exile, in prison, and in chains — since he was bound with chains, as the sacred narrative informs us — there to consume away by a slow death in a foul prison and in total darkness; yet all this happened to Zedekiah. We see then how God thunders against the Israelites, who thought themselves hardly treated in exile, since they might have remained safe at Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12:14

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| <p>14. And I will scatter toward every wind all that <i>are</i> about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them.</p> | <p>14. Et omnes qui in circuitu ejus sunt in auxilium ejus, et omnes alas ejus ²⁵³ dispergam ad omnem, <i>vel ad quemlibet</i>, ventura et gladium evaginabo post ipsos.</p> |
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He confirms the verse above, and says, that although Zedekiah had many soldiers as a garrison, and accustomed the people to bear arms, yet all this would not profit him, since God would disperse all the guards in whom he trusted. He says then, *that he would scatter to every wind all who were around Zedekiah* For unbelievers were deceived when they saw the king surrounded by auxiliaries, and the people of the city trained to warfare: and since Zedekiah was so armed for the defense of the city, they thought it could never be taken by the Chaldeans. God, therefore, here first of all teaches that the war was carried on under his auspices, and then that there was no doubt of his taking the city. He does not speak of the Chaldeans, lest unbelievers should institute a comparison — “it is true indeed that the Chaldeans are besieging the city with a strong and numerous army, but the city is impregnable, and besides it is defended with great spirit, and the king has forces sufficiently strong for his defense.” Lest this opinion should foolishly deceive the disbelievers, God comes into the field and turns their attention away from the Chaldeans. For this reason he ascribes to himself the conduct of the enemy: hence we gather that profane nations are in God’s hands, since he not only governs them by the spirit of regeneration, but compels even the impious, who desire to abolish his authority, to obey his commands. God does not draw his sword from heaven, nor do angels openly appear with drawn swords; the Chaldeans do that; but as it is said in Isaiah, (Isaiah 10:15,) Shall the ax boast itself against its owner? Since thus the vigor of the Chaldeans was nothing in itself, God armed them and then afforded them the success which he wished. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:15

²⁵³ That is, “all his garrison.” — Calvin.

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| <p>15. And they shall know that I <i>am</i> the LORD, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries.</p> | <p>15. Et cognoscent quod ego Iehovah, postquam expulero ipsos inter gentes, ²⁵⁴ et dispersero ipsos per terrag. ²⁵⁵</p> |
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Here God insults both Jews and Israelites who had united themselves. He says that he would so display his power that they should be compelled to acknowledge him, but to their own destruction. Experimental knowledge is sometimes attributed to the faithful; because when we are too slow, God shows us his power by sure proofs. But what is here said ought to be restricted to the reprobate and abandoned, who do not acknowledge God except in death. Yet Zedekiah was not entirely without the fear of God: he revered Jeremiah, and the seed of piety was not altogether extinct in his mind. As regards the people, inasmuch as they offered the daily sacrifice, they certainly cherished some opinion of God's favor, and also of his power. But because they despised the Prophets, they were altogether unsubdued, and made a laughing-stock of their threats, and for this cause they are said not to acknowledge God. And we must diligently notice this. For the impious do not think themselves so stupid as to refuse to God his just honor; but yet when God calls them they turn their backs: when he sets before them his message, even for their own advantage, they are not only deaf and stop their ears, but they are even riotous, and deride all his threats like idle stories. But it is certain that no knowledge of God can flourish when such contempt of his doctrine prevails. For this reason he says now, *at length the Jews shall know*, because this contempt hindered them from ascribing praise to God for his power; for they had been terrified by even his nod. Jeremiah had assiduously instructed them in God's word, but they were so hardened that they treated it as a thing of nought. The threat then is most grievous: as if God had said, When I smite you with my hand, you shall feel me to be God. Let us learn then to acknowledge God betimes by faith, because this is the fitting opportunity for salutary knowledge. Let us not abuse his patience while he rages against us with a stretched out hand, and pursues us fiercely. Sometimes, indeed, he chastises his own people for their good, but when it comes to pass that there is no hope of repentance to the reprobate, then he reduces them to nothing. Now it follows —

Ezekiel 12:16

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| <p>16. But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the numeri ²⁵⁶ a gladio, a fame, a peste, ut enarrent pestilence; that they may declare all their cunctas abominationes suas in gentibus, ad quas abominations among the heathen whither they venient; et cognoscent quod ego Iehovah. come; and they shall know that I <i>am</i> the LORD.</p> | <p>16. Et residuos faciam ex illis homines a gladio, a fame, a peste, ut enarrent pestilence; that they may declare all their cunctas abominationes suas in gentibus, ad quas abominations among the heathen whither they venient; et cognoscent quod ego Iehovah.</p> |
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Some think that God here speaks of the faithful, whom he had determined to preserve in the very midst of death. And certainly there is some mitigation of his former vengeance. But it is not

²⁵⁴ Or, "dissipate," or, "scatter abroad;" , *behephitzi*, signifies violent expulsion. — Calvin.

²⁵⁵ That is, "through different regions." — Calvin.

²⁵⁶ That is, "few men." — Calvin.

in harmony with the rest to understand the faithful here, for he is speaking of the people in general. But as we have already seen that the slaughter of the city was such that God scattered the remnant to the four winds, and this the Prophet confirms. We must hold, then, first of all, that this promise was not directed peculiarly to the elect or to God's Church, but rather that God is showing that exile will not be the end of woes to the captives, although they will not be directly cut to pieces. Their condition, indeed, might seem preferable, but God pronounces that he would be inexorable towards them. Although all should not perish by the sword, or famine, or pestilence, and some remnant should be left, that will happen, says he, not because I am going to be reconciled to them, but that I may spread their crimes among the Gentiles. For when he says, *that they may narrate*, he does not mean that they would be witnesses to their own sins, as the pious are accustomed, as we shall see elsewhere, to extol the mercy of God, and candidly to confess their faults before men. He does not mean that kind of confession which is a sign of repentance, but rather a real speech.²⁵⁷ For that exile uttered with a loud voice, that those men were abandoned whom God treated with such hostility. He had chosen the people, was the guardian of the city, and would have *been* their perpetual preserver, if their perverseness had not prevented it. Hence their being destitute of his aid, their being deprived of all their goods, their being treated tyrannically by their enemies, this made their extreme wickedness clearly appear. *They narrated*, then, not by words but by their actual position, their own sins to the Gentiles.

Now, therefore, we understand the intention of God: although some remained alive and unconcerned by either the sword, or famine, or pestilence, yet they were cursed, since their expulsion to a distance served no other purpose than that of spreading their disgrace and rendering them detestable, so flint the profane Gentiles acknowledged that they deserved vengeance for their wickedness. Therefore *they shall narrate among the Gentiles all their abominations, and they shall know that I am Jehovah*. Again he repeats that sentiment, that they should know too late what they had despised: since God had acted towards them as a father, and they had not acknowledged his favor; and at length they should be compelled to feel him as their judge, even to their eternal destruction.

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou declarest to us by so many proofs the formidable nature of thine anger, especially against the obstinate and rebellious, who reject thy word familiarly spoken to them: Grant, I say, that we may embrace what is proposed to us in thy name with the humility and reverence becoming' to thy children, so that we may repent of our sins, and obtain their pardon, until at length we are freed from all corruptions of the flesh, and become partakers of that eternal and celestial glory which thy only-begotten Son has purchased for us by his blood. — Amen.

LECTURE THIRTY THIRD

²⁵⁷ “*Realis sermo.*” — Calvin. “Une parole par effect, c’est a dire, reelle.” — Fr.

Ezekiel 12:17-19

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| 17. Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, | 17. Et fuit sermo Iehovae ad me dicendo, |
| 18. Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; | 18. Fili hominis, panem tuam in tremore comede, et aquas tuas in tumultu et dolore ²⁵⁸ bibe; |
| 19. And say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord GOD of the inhabitants of Dominator Jerusalem, <i>and</i> of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their in water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. | 19. Et dices ad populum terrae, Sic dicit Iehovah habitatoribus ²⁵⁹ Hierosolymae super terrain Israel, Panem snare comedent, et aquas suds in ²⁶⁰ anxietate, et aquas suds in ²⁶¹ vastetur terra a sua plenitudine, propter violentiam omnium qui habitant in ea. |

The Prophet is now ordered to represent the famine which awaited the Jews in both the siege and exile. But this prophecy ought to be especially referred to the time of the siege; for the Jews were in continual fear, and thought that by means of their garrison they would be impregnable. But as the Lord had often removed this trust from them, so he does now: hence therefore that miserable anxiety and fear, so that they never ate their bread but in fear, nor drank their water but in confusion. For a besieged city always fears for itself, and then the enemy so harasses them that fatigue at length compels the besieged to surrender. And it is probable, since the army of the Chaldees could often attempt to take the city with ease and without any great loss, that the Jews would daily be subject to fresh terrors, so that they could neither eat bread nor drink water except in anxiety and confusion. But because simple and unadorned teaching would not have been effective among the ten tribes and the Jews, hence an outward symbol is added. The Prophet therefore is the image of the besieged people, and hence he is ordered *to eat his bread with trembling*, that the spectacle might the more affect these slow and slothful men. By and bye the application follows, *thou shalt say to the people of the land* I do not doubt that he here means the ten tribes: hence the land signifies Chaldea, and those regions through which the exiles were dispersed. As we have before seen, it was to their advantage to hear this, because they thought that the Jews remaining at home were treated well, and themselves miserably. Hence not only their complaint but even their outcry against God and his servants, especially Jeremiah. This then is the reason why the Prophet is obliged to utter his discourse to the captives.

But afterwards it follows, *Thus saith the Lord Jehovah to the inhabitants of Jerusalem concerning the land of Israel*, that is, those remaining in the land of Israel. We here see that the land of Israel is distinguished from the other land, of which mention was lately made. Those who dwelt at Jerusalem remained quiet in their own inheritance; and hence their condition was esteemed better, because nothing is more sad than exile and captivity. But God pronounces them more miserable

²⁵⁸ Either "torture," or, "anxiety." — Calvin.

²⁵⁹ Or, "inhabitants." — Calvin.

²⁶⁰ Either "torture," or, "pain," for he repeats the same word. — Calvin.

²⁶¹ Or, "be made desolate." — Calvin.

than the captives, who had already been relieved from the principal part of their miseries. *They shall eat*, says he, *their bread in pain*, or torture, *and shall drink their water in desolation*: he does not repeat the same words which he had formerly used, but shortly shows that the Jews boasted in vain that they were still in safety: because very soon the enemy will press upon them, so that they should not be able to eat a mouthful of bread in peace. *That the land may be reduced*, says he, *from plenty to devastation*: some translate, after its plenty, which is forced and far-fetched; for the Prophet means that the land would be desert and empty through exhaustion: for plenty, as we well know, means an abundance of all things. Judea was then reduced from plenty to want, when the enemies plundered whatever it contained, and so the region was despoiled of its wealth. The reason follows, *through the violence of those who dwell in it*. Some explain this erroneously of the Chaldees, because they lost the whole land through their rapacity. For the Prophet rather advises that this vengeance of God was just, because in truth all the Jews were given up to violence, cruelty, and rapacity. , *chemes*, signifies all kinds of injury, but usually means violence and rapine. Hence we understand the Prophet's intention, namely, that the Jews suffered this slaughter deservedly, because the just reward of their wickedness was measured out to them. And thus Ezekiel represses all complaints, in which they too freely indulged, as if God was treating them too roughly and hardly. Therefore he shortly teaches them that he would not spare them any longer. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:20

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| <p>20. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I <i>am</i> the LORD.</p> | <p>20. Et urbes habitatae redigentur in solitudinem, et terra vasta erit, ²⁶² et cognoscetis quod ego Iehovah.</p> |
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He pursues the same sentiment. He had threatened destruction to Jerusalem and its citizens: he now adds the other cities of Judah which were still inhabited. Lastly, he speaks of the whole land, as if he said that no single corner should suppose itself free from slaughter, since God's vengeance should attack it as well as the cruelty of enemies through all regions. Jerusalem was the head of the whole nation; Ezekiel predicts its siege, and after that it became easy to overthrow and spoil other cities, so that the whole region was rendered subject to the lust of the enemies. He afterwards adds what we have noticed previously, *ye shall know that I am Jehovah* They had heard this instruction from the Prophets, they ought to have been imbued with it from their earliest childhood, for God had borne witness by many proofs that he was the true God. For his power had become sufficiently known and understood by the frequent succors by which that wretched people had been snatched from even immediate death. But as their impiety had stupified them, so that they carelessly despised not only the Prophet's teaching, but the very judgments of God, when he openly punished them, this knowledge is not mentioned without reason. When therefore God puts forth his hand for the last time to chastise them, he says that his power should be so manifest among them, that it should no longer escape them; but yet they were so hardened in their depravity that they almost entirely forgot God. For a contrast is always to be observed between that *knowledge* which springs

²⁶² Or, "desert." — Calvin.

from performance and that arising from utterance; for those who had closed their ears when God invites them to himself as servants, must be compelled to feel him to be God when he is silent and is executing his vengeance upon them. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:21-23

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| 21. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, | 21. Et fuit sermo Iehovae ad me dicendo, |
| 22. Son of man, what <i>is</i> that proverb <i>that</i> ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? | 22. Fill hominis, quodnam proverbium hoc vobis in terra Israel dicendo, prorogati sunt dies, ²⁶³ et evanuit omnis prophetia? |
| 23. Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. | 23. Propterea dices illis, sic dicit Dominator Iehovah, Quiescere ²⁶⁴ faciam proverbium hoc, et non pro-verbiabunt amplius in Israel: quin potius loquere ad eos, Appropinquarunt dies, et sermo omnis visionis. |

Here God inveighs against that gross ridicule which prevailed everywhere among the Jews. For when the Prophets had been threatening them so long, this their earnestness was so far from leading them to repentance, that they became more obstinate and callous. Since they persisted in this obstinacy, and boasted in their *escape*, and through *confidence* in their freedom from punishment, re-belied more and more against God, the Prophet is ordered to repress this their boasting. It was monstrous indeed for a people who had imbibed from childhood the teaching of the law and the Prophets, thus to break forth against God as if he had spoken falsely by his Prophets. For this was their boasting: *Oh! the days are prolonged: therefore every vision has passed away and failed* From this delay they argued that they had no cause for fear, since whatever Jeremiah and the rest had predicted had passed away. We perceive then how unbelievers turn the patience of God into material for obduracy and stupidity. God spares them, gives them leisure, and invites them to repentance; but what do they do? They count the days and years, and when they see that God does not immediately, execute the judgment which he had uttered by his servants, they laugh at it, and esteem the Prophet's words as idle fables. Such, then, was the impiety against which the Prophet inveighs, saying, *what is this?* The question implies detestation, for God here wonders at the sloth, nay fury of the people, because it dared thus to vomit forth its blasphemies with open mouth: 'for what remains when God is supposed to be false both in his promises and his threatenings? In this way all religion is abolished. Nor is it surprising that God detests so monstrous a thing, while he asks how it can happen that the Israelites break forth into such madness: *what*, says he, *is the meaning of this your proverb?* He seems to include his servant among the others, because he was one of the people: hence he participates in that which did not belong to him personally. Moreover, this passage

²⁶³ Or, "protracted." — Calvin.

²⁶⁴ Or, "cease." — Calvin.

must be diligently noticed, when the impious conclude that they have no occasion to fear, because their days are protracted.

This is, as I have said, a sign of extreme folly, but it is not surprising if they imagine God to be false to his word and his threats to be in vain, because his hand does not instantly appear, since they treat his teaching without the slightest respect. Since, therefore, unbelievers are never afraid unless terrified by the power of God, and are never in the slightest degree moved, it is not surprising that they think it entirely illusory, when they see him at rest while his words still resound in men's ears. Hence the language of the Apostle should come to mind, that Noah built the ark by faith, because he feared the hidden judgment of God of which he had been admonished, as if the whole deluge was before his eyes, in which he saw the whole world immersed. (Hebrews 11:7.) Although, therefore, God conceals his hand for the time, let us learn so to fear the whole of his instructions that delay may not lead us into such sloth as this.

Now he adds, *Thou shalt tell them, therefore, thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I will make this proverb cease from the land of Israel* Here God shows that his anger was more and more inflamed by their contempt. And the impious, by pretending that he is not true to his word, produce the effect of hastening the accomplishment of those judgments which otherwise God was prepared to suspend. Lastly, the impious stimulate God to exercise his vengeance, while they infer that they have escaped through delay, and that the vision was so fleeting and evanescent that they provoke him purposely to a contest. For the confirmation of this sentiment follows directly, *that verily the days were approaching*. Since time gave the Jews confidence in escape from punishment, God announces that the end was at hand, that they may feel themselves to have been too long blinded while they abused his continued forbearance. *The days then approached: also the word of every vision*: “the word” is here taken for the “effect.” We know that *deber*, is often taken for “thing,” “business,” “result;” but in this place the Prophet takes the word for the effect of the vision, as if he had said, that whatever the Prophets had spoken should be firm and stable. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:24

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| <p>24. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of mendacii, Israel.</p> | <p>24. Quia non erit amplius omnis visio²⁶⁵ et divinatio blandientis in medio²⁶⁶ domus Israel.</p> |
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Here God deprives the Jews of another source of confidence; for they flattered themselves, and had their own agitators, that is false Prophets, who puffed them up with flatteries: hence when they heard prophecies of sadness they despised them, and afterwards hardened themselves as if the Prophets had frightened them needlessly. Every one was too much inclined to this besotted confidence, but, as I have said, enticements were added, by which the flatterers deceived them. For the false Prophets said, that God would not be so severe, and that those predictions about the destruction of the city and temple were at variance with many promises. We see then that the

²⁶⁵ That is, “any vision.” — Calvin.

²⁶⁶ Or, “vanity.” — Calvin.

Prophets were despised by the voluntary contumacy of the people, and also by the perverse acts of the false Prophets. Afterwards God asserted, *that the days approached*: now he adds, *that there should be no more vision of vanity*, not that the false Prophets were altogether removed, but because their mouth was stopped, since the event had proved their wickedness. Since then the people were made ashamed by slaughter, in this sense and for this reason it is said, *that prophecies of vanity must be taken away*: afterwards, *divination of flattery from the midst of the house of Israel* For in ease and shade they promised themselves a prosperous delivery from their miseries. For when the people were dragged out of the city into exile, some were slain, others spoiled of their fortunes and treated ignominiously, then the character of those Prophets appeared who had nursed the perverse confidence of the people by their vain enticements. Now we understand the Prophet's genuine sense. It follows —

Ezekiel 12:25

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| <p>25. For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.</p> | <p>25. Quia ego Iehovah loquar: quod loquar verbum, faciam; ²⁶⁷ non protrahetur amplius, quia in diebus vestris domus exasperans, ²⁶⁸ quod loquar verbum, faciam illud, dicit Dominator Iehovah.</p> |
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He confirms the last verse. there is some obscurity in the context of the words, but as to the general sense, the Prophet wishes to teach simply that what even God had spoken should be shortly accomplished, since God wishes to assert his own fidelity by the execution of the vengeance which he had threatened by his servants. The Prophet here means, that it is not right to separate God's word from its effect, because God who speaks is not divided against himself. Whenever he opens his mouth, he stretches out his hand to fulfill his words. Now we understand the Prophet's meaning; and hence we may collect the usefulness of this teaching. For, because God's word seems cold to us and to be dissipated into air, we must always consider his hand. Whenever the Prophets speak, let God come before our eyes, and let him come not merely with bare words, but armed with his power, as if his hand was in some way included in his word. This is the meaning of the whole verse, *I Jehovah will utter a word, and whatever I shall utter that will I do: it shall be no lower delayed*, but, as I have often said, *it shall return, nay in your days, O rebellious house, I will do what I have spoken by my servants*. Here he expresses what might yet appear doubtful. For since a thousand years are with God as one day, the time might be thought near, even if the city had not been taken and destroyed with the temple for thirty years. But now God, after the manner of men, defines the time to be near, because those who were then alive should see the accomplishment of the prophecies which they had despised. It follows —

²⁶⁷ "The copula is not redundant." — Calvin

²⁶⁸ Or, "rebellious." — Calvin.

Ezekiel 12:26-28

26. Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, **26.** Et fuit sermo Iehovae ad me, dicendo,

27. Son of man, behold, *they of the house of Israel* say, The vision that he seeth *is* for many *visio quam hic vidit, ad dies multos extenditur,* days *to come,* and he prophesieth of the times *et in tempora longinqua ipse prophetat.* *that are far off.*

28. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord GOD. **28.** Propterea dices ad eos, Sic dicit Dominator Iehovah, non prorogabitur amplius; omnes sermones quos locutus fuero, sermonem etiam faciam, ²⁷⁰ dicit Dominator Iehovah.

Here indeed such detestable blasphemy as we lately heard is not condemned in the Jews: but oblique ridicule, the tendency of which was first of all to weaken all confidence in Prophecy, and then to get rid of all heavenly doctrine. Those who are now condemned by the Prophet did not dare to bluster against God with swollen cheeks, but when others concluded the Prophecies to be vain and frivolous, because the time was put off, they said — it may happen that God will accomplish what he has denounced against us by his servant: meanwhile let us feast securely as we shall be dead before these things can happen. We see, therefore, that there were two classes of men: some who utterly rejected God's Prophets, and wantonly derided their threats: this gross impiety has been already exposed. But others neither openly nor distinctly pronounced God to be a liar, but put far away from them the performance of the prophetic announcement. We see that the former were so abandoned, that they all but openly derided God, so as to turn away all fear from their own feelings since God prorogued the time. For Jeremiah had spent his strength in vain for many years in daily summoning them by a loud trumpet to God's tribunal, and in setting the Chaldeans before their eyes. Since he effected nothing, Ezekiel is chosen, and after he has inveighed against a fouler impudence in despising God, he now attacks the hypocrite who had not yet proceeded so far as to vilify God by the use of words. But as I have just remarked, the gliding down from this security to open contempt of God is easy. Those then who feign themselves quiet and without danger, since God patiently delays his judgments, at length determine him to be content with his own ease, and not to regard human affairs. Let us then be on our guard against the snares of Satan; and not only abhor the foul blasphemy of which the Prophet speaks, but as soon as God threatens us, let us prevent his judgment, and not promise ourselves a long period of escape, which may render us so stupid as to deprive us of all fear.

The house of Israel then said, he prophesies for many days. They did not openly assert that Ezekiel was speaking rashly and arrogating to himself the prophetic name, but they said that *he prophesied for many days and a long period.* Now he adds, *thou shalt say unto them, it shall not be any lower put off* Some thus interpret these words — all my discourses shall not be put off. They prefer a change of number, and resolve it thus — each of my words shall not be put. off. But the

²⁶⁹ "Saying. — Calvin.

²⁷⁰ Or, "I will fulfill." — Calvin.

other view seems to suit the context better: *it shall not be put off any lower, for the words which I utter I will execute* Here again he confirms what we formerly saw: that God would not *speaking* in vain, since he is not divided in opinion. It belongs to men to lie, and to utter vainly what they cannot perform, and to change their; nothing of the kind ought to be imagined of God, for his hand is always in union with his speech. ²⁷¹

PRAYER.

Grant us, Almighty God, since thou sparest us in some degree, and meanwhile dost admonish us by no obscure signs of thine anger, to be wise in time, lest sloth seize upon our minds and dispositions, and deprive us of sound judgment: Grant also that we may be attentive to thy words, and to all proofs of thy coming vengeance, and may we so strive to be reconciled to thee, that for the future being born again of thy Spirit, we may henceforth glorify thy name through Christ Jesus our Lord. — Amen

²⁷¹ The reader may profitably peruse the comment of Ecolampadius on this chapter. He spiritualizes it more than Calvin, and treats it allegorically, thus giving it a personal and practical bearing on ourselves. He says, “Unica et perpetua allegoria est, propter contemptum verbi Dei instare captivitatem conscientiarum, et alienationem a Jerusalem, a vero Dei cultu, qui est in spiritu et veritate; unde servilia opera peccatorum in sabbatismo Christi vetantur.” His explanations are always sound, and his practical reflections very instructive.

The translation of Ezekiel 1-12 is located here.

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Genesis

1:6 1:7 1:8 4:9 9:13 13:15 17:8 19:2 19:3 27:34 32:30

Exodus

3:2 3:3 9:24 12:22 12:23 19:4 19:20 20:5 20:18 25:20 28:20 37:9 40:34 40:35

Leviticus

5:3 6:12 6:13 7:21 9 25 25:13 25:14 25:15 26:26 26:26

Numbers

7:89 9:15 11:16 14:18 16:11

Deuteronomy

5:9 5:33 6:4 8:3 8:3 14:1 17:3 28:46 28:54 28:55 30:19 32:15 32:21

Judges

2:2

1 Samuel

15:22

2 Samuel

6:2 6:2 12:12 16:21 16:22

1 Kings

6:5 8:10 8:11 8:64 12 12:20 12:28 13:2

2 Kings

19:15 19:35 22 23:23 23:36 24:8 24:15 25 25 25:4 25:5

2 Chronicles

34:14 35:18

Job

1:6 4:18 22:14

Psalms

3:4 11:4 18 18:8-15 18:12 22:2 27:5 29:5 29:6 29:9 32:1 32:2 32:3 33:12 36:6
40:8 69:10 74 74:9 74:12 76:9 79 80:1 80:11 89:36 89:37 89:37 89:37 89:38
89:38 90:1 91:11 91:12 100:3 102:1 103:8 103:19 103:20 103:21 132:14 132:14
132:14 132:14 137:1 137:6 138:8

Isaiah

1:9 1:10 6:1 6:2 6:9 6:10 8 8:12 8:13 8:16 8:16 8:18 8:18 9:20 10:15 11 13
18:1 18:7 28:11 28:13 28:15 29:11 29:15 30:21 31:2 33:22 37:16 37:36 45:9 48:22
55:11 57:3 57:21 60:7 64:3 66:1 66:1

Jeremiah

1:2 1:13 1:13 1:19 2:10 2:11 2:28 7:2 7:4 7:4 7:17 9:1 11:7 11:13 12 15:2
15:16 15:16 15:20 18:18 20 20:2 26 28 29:5 29:21 29:24 31:33 32:7 32:8 32:9
35:14 36 36:25-27 39 39:4 39:5 39:10 43:2 43:3 43:4 44:15 44:16 44:17-19 46

Lamentations

4:10 4:10 4:20

Ezekiel

1 1 1:1 1:1-2 1:2 1:3 1:4 1:4 1:5 1:6 1:7 1:8 1:9 1:10 1:11 1:12 1:13 1:14
 1:15 1:16 1:17 1:18 1:19 1:20 1:21 1:22 1:23 1:24 1:25-26 1:27 1:28 1:28 2:1-2
 2:3 2:3 2:4-5 2:5 2:6 2:6 2:7 2:8 2:8 2:9-10 3:1-2 3:3 3:3 3:4-7 3:8-9 3:10-11
 3:12 3:13 3:14 3:15 3:16-17 3:17 3:18 3:19 3:20 3:21 3:22-23 3:24 3:25-26 3:27
 4:1-3 4:4-8 4:9 4:10-11 4:12-13 4:14-15 4:16 4:16-17 5:1-4 5:5-6 5:7-8 5:9-10 5:11
 5:12 5:13 5:14 5:15 5:16 5:17 6:1-3 6:4 6:5 6:6 6:7 6:8 6:9 6:10 6:11 6:12 6:13
 6:14 7 7 7:1-2 7:3 7:4 7:5 7:6 7:7 7:8 7:9 7:10 7:11 7:12 7:13 7:14 7:15 7:16
 7:17 7:18 7:19 7:20 7:21 7:22 7:23 7:24 7:25 7:26 7:27 8 8 8:1 8:2 8:3 8:4
 8:5 8:6 8:7-11 8:12 8:12 8:13-14 8:15-16 8:17 8:18 9:1 9:2 9:3-4 9:5-6 9:7 9:8
 9:9 9:10 9:11 10 10 10:1 10:2 10:3 10:4 10:5 10:6-7 10:8 10:9 10:10 10:10
 10:11-12 10:13 10:14 10:14 10:15 10:16 10:17 10:18-19 10:20 10:21 10:22 11:1-2
 11:3 11:4 11:5 11:6-7 11:8-11 11:12 11:13 11:14-16 11:17 11:18 11:19-20 11:21
 11:22-23 11:24 11:25 12 12:1-2 12:3 12:4 12:5-6 12:7 12:8-11 12:12 12:13 12:14
 12:15 12:16 12:17-19 12:20 12:21-23 12:24 12:25 12:26-28 13:19 16 16 16:3 19
 20 20 23 24 24:18 25 25 33 35 40

Daniel

6:10 7:9

Hosea

1 2:8 4:10 5:11

Amos

5:18

Micah

6:14 6:16

Habakkuk

1:2

Zephaniah

3:9

Haggai

2:9

Zechariah

12:10

Matthew

3:16 4:4 10:12 10:13 10:29 10:29 15:14 24:13 24:27

Luke

4:4 6:39 10:5 10:6 12:6 16:15

John

1:5 3 5:17 5:17 12:41 12:41 14:10 14:11 15:18

Acts

7:56 14:17 20:28 20:31

Romans

2:12 6:12 7:14 8:9 9:6 9:7 9:20 9:29 11:29

1 Corinthians

1:25 4:20 4:20 4:21 7:29 7:30 7:31 9:16 10:3 10:4

2 Corinthians

2:15 2:16 5:14 6:8 6:11 10:5-7 10:6 12:4

Ephesians

2:10 3:10

Philippians

1:23 2:7 2:12 2:13 3:18

Colossians

1:16 1:16

1 Thessalonians

5:4 5:5

1 Timothy

3:16 3:16 6:16

2 Timothy

2:19 2:19 4:2

Hebrews

2:13 10:7 11:7 11:7

James

4:12 4:12

1 Peter

1:23 3:14 3:15 4:11

2 Peter

1:19 2:7

1 John

2:19 3:9 5:20

Revelation

4:3

Index of Scripture Commentary**Ezekiel**

1:1 1:3 1:4 1:5 1:6 1:7 1:8 1:9 1:10 1:11 1:12 1:13 1:14 1:15 1:16 1:17 1:18
 1:19 1:20 1:21 1:22 1:23 1:24 1:25 1:27 1:28 2:1 2:3 2:4 2:5 2:6 2:7 2:8 2:9
 2:10 3:1 3:3 3:4 3:6 3:7 3:8 3:9 3:10 3:11 3:12 3:13 3:14 3:15 3:16 3:17 3:18
 3:19 3:20 3:21 3:22 3:24 3:25 3:26 3:27 4:1 4:4 4:7 4:9 4:10 4:12 4:14 4:16
 5:1 5:3 5:4 5:5 5:6 5:7 5:8 5:9 5:10 5:11 5:12 5:13 5:14 5:15 5:16 5:17 6:1
 6:3 6:4 6:5 6:6 6:7 6:8 6:9 6:10 6:11 6:12 6:13 6:14 7:1 7:3 7:4 7:5 7:6 7:7
 7:8 7:9 7:10 7:11 7:12 7:13 7:14 7:15 7:16 7:17 7:18 7:19 7:20 7:21 7:22 7:23
 7:24 7:25 7:26 7:27 8:1 8:2 8:3 8:4 8:5 8:6 8:7 8:11 8:12 8:13 8:15 8:17 8:18
 9:1 9:2 9:3 9:4 9:5 9:7 9:8 9:9 9:10 9:11 10:1 10:2 10:3 10:4 10:5 10:6 10:8

10:9 10:10 10:11 10:12 10:13 10:14 10:15 10:16 10:17 10:18 10:20 10:21 10:22
 11:1 11:3 11:4 11:5 11:6 11:8 11:12 11:13 11:14 11:17 11:18 11:19 11:20 11:21
 11:22 11:24 11:25 12:1 12:3 12:5 12:7 12:8 12:12 12:13 12:14 12:15 12:16 12:17
 12:20 12:21 12:24 12:25 12:26

Index of Greek Words and Phrases

-
- μ
- μ
- μ
- μ
- μ
-
- μ
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-
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Index of Hebrew Words and Phrases

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Index of Latin Words and Phrases

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- Christus dominus glorioe
- Deum essentiatum. Deus factitius
- Ex proprio sensu
- Expositio mysterii quod hac visione adumbratur
- Orat. pro Murcena
- Os homini sublime
- Quia nisi nobis arrideat Dei vocatio, et sensus noster subscribat
- Realis
- Unica et perpetua allegoria est, propter contemptum verbi Dei instare captivitatem conscientiarum, et alienationem a Jerusalem, a vero Dei cultu, qui est iu spiritu et veritate; unde servilia opera peccatorum in sabbatismo Christi vetantur
- Virtutes
- ad quatuor adfaciem cujusque
- adminicula
- de Christianis ad Trajanum
- gratia est firmamentum justitioe Christi
- heus
- mala ova malorum corvorum
- merus est fucus
- quaest
- vel

Index of French Words and Phrases

-
- Dieu essentie. Dieu qui a este fait
- On leur ouvrage ou leur facon
- Pource que si la vocation de Dieu ne nous vient a gre, et que nostre sens l'approuve
- Qui les repreuve
- Une parole par effect, c'est a dire, reelle
- Vertus
- a quatre a la face d' un chacun
- aux quatre
- mats

- maximes
- selon que l'esprit estoit pour cheminer, ils cheminoyent