

CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 18

This chapter contains an answer to an objection of the Jews to the dealings of God with them in a providential way. The objection is expressed in a proverb of common use among them, and complained of as being without cause, (²⁶⁸⁰¹Ezekiel 18:1,2); however, for the future, no occasion should be given them to use it; for, though God could justify his proceedings upon the foot of his sovereignty, all souls being his; yet he was determined none but the sinner himself should suffer, (²⁶⁸⁰³Ezekiel 18:3,4); and puts various cases for the illustration and vindication of his proceedings; as that a just man, who is described by his proper characters, as abstaining from several sins specified, and doing what is right and good, should surely live, (²⁶⁸⁰⁵Ezekiel 18:5-9); but that the son of such a just man, being the reverse of his father's character, should surely die, (²⁶⁸¹⁰Ezekiel 18:10-13); and again, the son of such a wicked man, observing the heinousness of his father's sins, and abstaining from them, though his father should die in his iniquities, he should not die for them, but live, (²⁶⁸¹⁴Ezekiel 18:14-18); by which it appears that the dealings of God with the Jews were not according to the proverb used by them, but quite agreeable to his resolution; that the sinner, be he a father or a son, shall die for his own sins; and that the righteous man's righteousness shall be upon him, and the wicked man's sin upon him, and accordingly both shall be dealt with, (²⁶⁸¹⁹Ezekiel 18:19,20); which is further illustrated by a wicked man's turning from his sinful course, and doing righteousness, and living in that righteousness he has done; which is more agreeable to God that he should live, and not die in sin, (²⁶⁸²¹Ezekiel 18:21-23); and by a righteous man turning from his righteousness, and living a vicious life, and dying in it, (²⁶⁸²⁴Ezekiel 18:24); from both which instances this conclusion follows, that God is to be justified; and that his ways are equal, and the Jews' ways were unequal, and their complaint unjust, (²⁶⁸²⁵Ezekiel 18:25); and the same instances are repeated in a different order, and the same conclusion formed, (²⁶⁸²⁶Ezekiel 18:26-29); upon which the Lord determines to judge them according to their own ways, their personal actions, good or bad; and exhorts them to

repentance and reformation; and closes with a pathetic expostulation, with them, (²³⁸⁰Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Ver. 1. *And the word of the Lord came unto me again, saying.*] The word of prophecy from the Lord, as the Targum; and its being mentioned is coming from the Lord is to give it weight and authority. This is a distinct sermon or prophecy from the former, and was sent and delivered out at another time.

Ver. 2. *What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, &c.*] This is spoken to the Jews in Babylon, who used the following proverb concerning the land of Israel; not the ten tribes, but the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, concerning the desolation of the land, and the hardships the Jews laboured under, since the captivity of Jeconiah, and they became subject to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar: this expostulation with them suggests that they had no just cause, or true reason, to make use of the proverb; that it was impious, impudent, and insolent in them, and daring and dangerous; and that they did not surely well consider what they said. The proverb follows:

saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? that is, as the Targum explains it,

“the fathers have sinned, and the children are smitten,”

or punished, as the ten tribes for the sins of Jeroboam, and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin for the sins of Manasseh; hereby wiping themselves clean; and as if they were innocent persons, and free from sin, and were only punished for their forefathers' sins, and so charging God with injustice and cruelty; whereas, though the Lord threatened to visit the iniquity of parents upon their children, and sometimes did so, to deter parents from sinning, lest they should entail a curse, and bring ruin upon their posterity; yet he never did this but when children followed their fathers' practices, and committed the same sins, or worse; so that this was no act of unrighteousness in God, but rather an instance of his patience and long suffering; (see ²⁸¹²Jeremiah 31:29,30).

Ver. 3. *[As] I live, saith the Lord God, &c.*] This is a form of an oath; the Lord here swears by his life, by himself, because he could swear by no greater, (²⁸¹³Hebrews 6:13); and it expresses how displeased he was with the above proverb, and how much he resented it, as well as the certainty of

what follows; which, it might be depended on, would be assuredly done, since the Lord not only said it, but swore unto it:

ye shall not have [occasion] any more to use this proverb in Israel; signifying that he would no longer defer the execution of his judgments, but immediately bring them upon them; so that or the future there would be no use of the proverb; no occasion to make mention of it in the next generation; and, moreover, that he would make it so manifest to themselves and others, by his dealings with them, that it should be seen, and known, and acknowledged by all, that it was for their own sins and transgressions that they were visited and corrected.

Ver. 4. *Behold, all souls are mine,* &c.] By creation; they being the immediate produce of his power; hence he is called “the Father of spirits”, (~~8129~~ Hebrews 12:9), or the souls of men; these he has an apparent right unto; a property in; a dominion over; they are accountable to him, and will be judged impartially by him:

as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; and therefore must be thought to have as great a respect and affection for the one as for the other; for the soul of a son as for the soul of a father; and not deal partially in favour of the one, and cruelly and unrighteously with the other:

the soul that sinneth, it shall die; the soul that continues in sin, without repentance towards God, and faith in Christ, shall die the second death; shall be separated from the presence of God, and endure his wrath to all eternity: or the meaning is, that a person that is guilty of gross sins, and continues in them, shall personally suffer; he shall endure one calamity or another, as the famine, sword, pestilence, or be carried into captivity, which is the death all along spoken of in this chapter; the Lord will exercise no patience towards him, or defer punishment to a future generation, his offspring; but shall immediately execute it upon himself.

Ver. 5. *But if a man be just,* &c.] Not legally, as to be wholly free from sin, for there is no such just man, (~~2072~~ Ecclesiastes 7:20); but evangelically, through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto him; and who has a principle of grace and holiness wrought in him; a man of a just principle and good conscience; who is disposed by the grace of God to that which is just and right; for this seems to refer to the inward frame of the mind, as distinct from actions, and as the source of them, as follows:

and do that which is lawful and right; or “judgment”^{f263} and “justice”; true judgment and justice, as the Targum; that which is just and right by the law of God, and is so between man and man; the particulars of which follow:

Ver. 6. [*And hath not eaten upon the mountains*, &c.] Where temples and altars were built for idols, and sacrifices offered up to them; and where feasts were kept to the honour of them, and the sacrifices to them eaten; (see ^{<4163>}Ezekiel 6:13); for otherwise it was not unlawful to eat common food on mountains, as well as on other places; but here it denotes idolatrous practices; and the Targum is,

“and hath not served idols on the mountains:”

neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel; their “dunghill gods”^{f264} as the word signifies; as not to the idols of the Gentiles, so not to those of Israel, as the calves at Daniel and Bethel; these he does not worship, nor pray unto, or invoke, nor even give a pleasant and favourable look unto; but turned from them with abhorrence and contempt:

neither hath defiled his neighbour’s wife; been guilty of adultery, by lying with another man’s wife; or by marrying one divorced, not having committed fornication; which divorces were common among the Jews, and marrying such so divorced, (^{<499>}Matthew 19:19);

neither hath come near to a menstruous woman: a woman in her monthly courses, even his own wife; who, according to the law, was set apart for her uncleanness for a certain term of time; during which she was not to be touched, nor anything she sat or lay upon; and all conjugal acts to be abstained from, (^{<859>}Leviticus 15:19-24 18:19 20:18).

Ver. 7. *And hath not oppressed any*, &c.] By fraud or force, particularly the poor, to the great grief and hurt of them:

[*but*] *hath restored to the debtor his pledge*; which was pawned; not embezzling it, or keeping it beyond the time fixed by the law of God, (^{<842>}Deuteronomy 24:12,13 ^{<1226>}Exodus 22:26);

hath spoiled none by violence; has not committed theft and robbery, or done injury to any man’s person and property:

hath given his bread to the hungry; which was his own; what he had laboured for, and come by honestly, and so had a right to dispose of; and

being merciful, as well as just, eats not his morsel alone, but distributes it to the poor and hungry, (^{<2887>}Isaiah 58:7);

and hath covered the naked with a garment; as Job did, as well as the former, and for which Dorcas is commended, (^{<8317>}Job 31:17-20 ^{<4188>}Acts 9:39).

Ver. 8. *He [that] hath not given forth upon usury, &c.*] Money, victuals, or any other thing, which was forbidden the Jews to take of their brethren, though they might of strangers, (^{<1529>}Deuteronomy 23:19,20);

neither hath taken any increase: or interest; or rather something over and above the interest money or use, as a gratuity for lending it upon the said interest:

[that] hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity; not only that now mentioned, but all others; who, having inadvertently engaged in that which is sinful, as soon as it appears to him to be so, gets out of it, and abstains from it as soon as possible:

hath executed true judgment between man and man; whether in office as a judge, who sits on the bench for that purpose; or as an arbitrator chosen to decide matters in controversy between one man and another, and that does everything just and right between man and man.

Ver. 9. *Hath walked in my statutes, &c.*] Respecting the worship of God and true religion; being observant of all laws and ordinances relating thereunto:

and hath kept my judgments to deal truly; in things moral and civil among men; regarding all such laws of God as oblige to such things:

he [is] just; such a man is a just man, at least externally; and if he does all these things from a right principle, without trusting to them for justification before God, and acceptance with him, but looking to the righteousness of Christ for these things, he is truly, and in the sight of God, a just man:

he shall surely live, saith the Lord God; spiritually and comfortably here, and an eternal life hereafter; or rather he shall not be distressed with famine, sword, or plague, or go into captivity; but shall live in his own land, and eat the good things of it; and this shall be his case, let his father have been what he will, ever so great a sinner.

Ver. 10. *If he beget a son [that is] a robber, a shedder of blood, &c.]* But if this just man beget a son that is a thief and a murderer, as he may; for grace is not conveyed by natural generation, though sin is: a good man has often bad children, even such as are guilty of capital crimes, as a “robber”, a “highwayman”, a “breaker up”, or “through”, as the word^{f265} signifies; one that breaks through walls, and into houses, and breaks through all the laws of God and man; and sticks not to shed innocent blood in committing his thefts and robberies, as these sins often go together; such an one was Barabbas, whose name signifies the son of a father, and perhaps his father might be a good man:

and [that] doeth the like to [any] one of these [things]; or that does anyone of these things, whether theft or murder.

Ver. 11. *And that doeth not any of those [duties], &c.]* Before mentioned, which his father did, but the reverse of them; and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, “and in the way of his righteous father does not walk”; does not tread in his steps, and work righteousness as he did:

but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour’s wife; has been guilty of idolatry and adultery; (see Gill on “²³⁸⁰⁶Ezekiel 18:6”).

Ver. 12. *Hath oppressed the poor and needy, &c.]* Who are weak, and have none to help them, and stand by them, and so are oppressed by such a man. This serves to explain the clause, in (²³⁸⁰⁷Ezekiel 18:7);

hath spoiled by violence; his neighbour’s goods; taken them away from him by force:

hath not restored the pledge; to the borrower before sunset, but kept it for his own use; taking the advantage of the poverty of him that borrowed of him:

and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols; whether of the Gentiles, or of the house of Israel:

hath committed abomination; either idolatry, the sin just before mentioned, which was an abomination to the Lord; or else approaching to a menstruous woman, since this follows the other in (²³⁸⁰⁶Ezekiel 18:6); and is not mentioned, unless it is designed here; and so Kimchi interprets it; but Jarchi understands it of the abominable and detestable sin of sodomy: it may regard any and every sin that is abominable in the sight of God.

Ver. 13. *Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase, &c.*]

Contrary to the law of God; (see Gill on “^{238B}Ezekiel 18:8”);

shall he then live? by virtue of his father’s righteousness and goodness, free from calamities, and in the quiet possession of the land of Israel, and the good things of it:

he shall not live; but go into captivity, and be destitute of the good things of life he has enjoyed; and, without repentance, shall never have eternal life:

he hath done all these abominations; before mentioned; theft, murder, idolatry, adultery, oppression of the poor, and usury, sins against both tables of the law:

he shall surely die; the death of affliction, or undergo temporal punishment; and not only die corporeally, but eternally too, if grace prevent not: “in dying he shall die”^{f266}; as in the Hebrew text; he shall die both the first and second death; his father’s goodness shall not save him from either:

his blood shall be upon him; or “bloods”^{f267}; the innocent blood he has shed, which he must answer for being guilty of, and shall not escape righteous judgment, and his own blood, the destruction of himself; he shall be the cause of his own ruin, and bring just punishment on his own head.

Ver. 14. *Now, lo, [if] he beget a son, &c.*] That is, the wicked man before mentioned; if he begets a son who proves a good man, which sometimes is the case, as Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, and Josiah the son of Amon:

that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done; not every particular action, but the principal of them; however, the several sorts and kinds of sin he was addicted to, and which were done publicly enough, and obvious to view; and yet does not imitate them, as children are apt to do:

and considereth: the evil nature and tendency of them; how abominable to God; how contrary to his law; how scandalous and reproachful in themselves, and how pernicious and destructive in their effects and consequences. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions, read, “and feareth”:

and doeth not such like; he fears God; and because the fear of God is before his eyes, and on his heart, which was wanting in his father, therefore

he cannot do the things he did; the fear of offending him, the fear of his goodness, and of his judgments, both have an influence to restrain from sin.

Ver. 15. [*That*] *hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife.*] (See Gill on “²⁵⁸¹⁶Ezekiel 18:6”); where the same things are mentioned as here, and in the same order; only that clause, “neither hath come near to a menstruous woman”, is here omitted.

Ver. 16. *Neither hath oppressed any, &c.*] (See Gill on “²⁵⁸¹⁷Ezekiel 18:7”).

hath not withholden the pledge; or, hath not pledged the pledge^{f268}. The meaning is, not that he had not given one, but had not taken one. So the Targum,

“the pledge he hath not taken;”

or, if he did, he did not keep it beyond the time the law directs, but restored it to him whose it was;

neither hath spoiled by violence, [but] hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment. The rest of the verse is the same with (²⁵⁸¹⁷Ezekiel 18:7).

Ver. 17. [*That*] *hath taken off his hand from the poor, &c.*] When he perceived it lay heavy upon him, withdrew it from hurting him, and forbore to do it when it was in his power, and perhaps eased him of the hardships his father had laid upon him; which was very kind and humane:

[*that*] *hath not received usury nor increase;* (see Gill on “²⁵⁸¹⁸Ezekiel 18:8”);

hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; had not only negative, but positive holiness: not only abstained from things sinful, but did that which was just and right, both with respect to God and man; observed the worship of God, and did justice to mankind:

he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; or be punished for his father's sins, with sword, famine, pestilence, or captivity; shall not die a corporeal death, and much less eternal death, on that account:

he shall surely live; in his own land, and in the enjoyment of the good things of life; and having the grace and fear of God, and acting from

gracious principles, with a view to the glory of God, he shall live eternally, though the son of a wicked man.

Ver. 18. [*As for his father*, &c.] It shall be otherwise with him:

because he cruelly oppressed; or, “oppressed an oppression”; or, “with an oppression”^{†269}; oppressed the poor, and had no mercy on them, but used them in the most rigorous manner:

spoiled his brother by violence; took away the spoil of his brother; spoiled him of his substance; did injury to his person and property, and all the mischief that lay in his power:

and did [that] which [is] not good among his people; neighbours, citizens, and countrymen; did nothing which was good, as he ought to have done; but everything that was bad, which he should not have done:

lo, even he shall die in his iniquity: and for it; it shall not be forgiven him; he shall be punished for it with death, with the death of affliction; and with corporeal death, as a punishment for sin; and with eternal death, dying in his sins, and in a state of impenitence. These instances, put every way, most clearly show the equity of God; the justness of his proceedings in providence; and how inapplicable the proverb in (~~GEN~~ Ezekiel 18:2) was to them; and that such that sin, and continue therein, shall die for their own iniquities, and not for the sins of others.

Ver. 19. *Yet say ye, why?* &c.] Why do you say so? why do you go on to assert that which is not fact, or which is contrary to fact, contrary to what we feel and experience every day, to say that children are not punished for their parents’ sins? these are the words of the murmuring, complaining, and blaspheming Jews, quarrelling with the prophet, and with the Lord himself:

doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? have not we proof of it every day we live? are not our present case and circumstances a full evidence of it? or the words may be rendered, “why does not the son bear the iniquity of the father?” so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions; or, as the Targum,

“why is not the son punished for the sins of the father?”

and so they are an objection, which is foreseen might be made, and is here anticipated, to which an answer is returned; and so the Syriac version introduces it, “but if they said”, &c. then adds, “tell them”, as follows:

when, or “because”

the son hath done that which is lawful [and] right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them: this is the reason why he shall not bear his father’s sins, or be punished for them; intimating that they had not done these things that made the complaint, or put the question; but had committed the same sins their fathers had, and so were punished, not for their fathers’ sins, but their own: for otherwise the man that does what is just and right with God, and between man and man,

he shall surely live; (see Gill on “⁻²⁶⁸¹⁷Ezekiel 18:17”).

Ver. 20. *The soul that sinneth, it shall die,* &c.] This is repeated from (⁻²⁶⁸¹⁸Ezekiel 18:4), for the further confirmation of it:

the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; that is, as the Targum paraphrases it,

“the son shall not be punished for the sins of the father, nor shall the father be punished for the sins of the son.”

This is to be understood of adult persons, and of actual sins; for of such only the prophet speaks throughout the whole chapter, or of temporal, and not of eternal punishment:

the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him; he shall be rewarded with temporal good things in this life, according to his righteousness; which, as the Targum says, shall “remain” upon him; (see ⁻²⁶⁸¹⁹Psalms 112:9); he shall eat of the fruit of his own doings, (⁻²⁶⁸²⁰Isaiah 3:10); this is true of a man that is evangelically righteous, or is so through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to him; which is upon him as a robe to clothe him, and will always remain on him, being an everlasting righteousness, and will answer for him in a time to come:

and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him; and not another; his sin shall remain on him unatoned for, unexpiated, not taken away or forgiven; the punishment of it shall be on him, and abide upon him.

Ver. 21. *But if the wicked,* &c.] So far is the Lord from punishing the sins of one man upon another, that he will not punish a man for his own sins: if he

will turn from all his sins that he hath committed: if he truly repents of them, and thoroughly forsakes them; for it must not be one sin only, but all; every sin is to be loathed and mourned over, and sorrow expressed for it, and to be forsaken; not one sin is to be cherished and retained, but all to be relinquished: or the repentance and conversion may be justly questioned whether they be sincere:

and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right; as the repentance and turning from sin must be general, so also obedience to the commands of God, both moral and positive; respect is to be had to all his ordinances, which are all of them to be esteemed as right and lawful, and to be observed: this is bringing forth fruits meet for repentance:

he shall surely live, he shall not die; he shall live in his own land, and not go into captivity. Kimchi's note is, he shall live in this world, and not die in the world to come; so Ben Melech.

Ver. 22. *All his transgressions that he hath committed*, &c.] Before his repentance, conversion, and obedience:

they shall not be mentioned unto him; they shall not be charged upon his conscience, or brought against him in providence; he shall not be upbraided with them, or punished for them; but they shall be forgiven him, at least in such sense as to prevent temporal calamity and ruin:

in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live; he shall live "in" it, though not "for" it; this will be the fruit and consequence of his obedience and righteousness, that he shall live and not die, in the sense that has been already given, according to the tenor of the law, (^{
}Leviticus 18:5).

Ver. 23. *Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God*, &c.] Perish by sword, famine, or pestilence, or go into captivity; this, though the Lord's will and work, yet is his strange work; mercy is his delight. This is to be understood not absolutely; for the Lord does take pleasure in these things, as they fulfil his word, secure the honour of his truth and holiness, and glorify his justice, and especially when they are the means of reclaiming men from the evil of their ways; but comparatively, as follows:

[and] not that he should return from his ways, and live? that is, it is more pleasing to God that a man should repent of his sins, and forsake his

vicious course of life, and enjoy good things, than to go on in his sins, and bring ruin on himself, here and hereafter.

Ver. 24. *But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, &c.]*

This is to be understood, not of a truly righteous man; for no man can be so denominated from his own righteousness; but from the righteousness and obedience of Christ; and such a man cannot turn from his righteousness; for that is the righteousness of God, and can never be lost; and is an everlasting one, and will always endure; and with which eternal life is inseparably connected: but this is to be interpreted of one that is reckoned so from his own righteousness, what he himself has done, and not from another, from the righteousness of Christ, which he has wrought out; he is one that is righteous in his own esteem, and in the account of others; who is outwardly righteous before men; who trusts in himself that he is righteous, and trusts to his own righteousness; (see ^{<3813>}Ezekiel 33:13); whose righteousness is not an evangelical one, but either a ceremonial righteousness, or at most a mere moral one, consisting of some negative holiness, and a few moral performances, as appears from (^{<3815>}Ezekiel 18:5-9); and from such a righteousness as this a man may turn, commit iniquity, sin and die; (see ^{<3821>}2 Peter 2:20,21); and is no proof or instance of the apostasy of real saints, true believers, or truly righteous men; besides, this man is represented as a transgressor, or “prevaricator”, as the word signifies; a hypocrite, a man destitute of the truth of grace, and of true righteousness:

and committeth iniquity; makes a trade of sinning; goes into a vicious course of life, and continues in it; which a truly gracious man, one that is born again, and has true faith in Christ’s righteousness, by which he is justified, can never do, (^{<3818>}1 John 3:8,9);

[and] doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked [man] doeth; such as theft, murder, adultery, idolatry, oppression of the poor, and giving upon usury, (^{<3810>}Ezekiel 18:10-13);

shall he live? in his own land, in peace and prosperity, enjoying all manner of good things? he shall not; much less shall he live an eternal life, so living and dying:

all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: or, “all his righteousnesses”^{f270}; all the good works which he has done will never come into any account, or be of any avail; as they merited nothing, they will meet

with no reward; they will not preserve him from present calamity, which his now sinful life exposes him to, nor secure him from eternal ruin; these may be mentioned and pleaded by himself, but to no purpose; God will not mention them, nor take any notice of them, nor the Judge at the great day of account, (⁴⁰⁷²Matthew 7:22,23);

in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die; or, for his hypocrisy, “prevarication”⁴²⁷¹, and vicious course of life he now lives in, a death of affliction shall come upon him; great calamities and distresses in this world; and, if grace prevent not, eternal death in the other; if he dies in his trespasses and sins, he will die the second death.

Ver. 25. *Yet ye say*, &c.] Notwithstanding these plain instances, which show the equity of God in his proceedings, and vindicate his justice in the dispensations of his providence; yet such was the blindness and stupidity of these people, or rather their stubbornness, obstinacy, and impudence, that they still insisted upon it that

the way of the Lord is not equal; just and right; is not even, according to the rules of justice and equity; or is not ordered aright, is not steady, and firm, and consistent with himself, and the declaration of his will; a very bold and blasphemous charge, and yet the Lord condescends to reason with them about it:

hear now, O house of Israel; the ten tribes that were now in captivity; or the Jews that were carried captive with Jeconiah, with those that were still in Jerusalem and Judea; these are called upon to hear the Lord, what he had to say in vindication of himself from this charge, as it was but just and reasonable they should:

is not my way equal? plain and even, constant and uniform, according to the obvious rules of justice and truth? can any instance be given to the contrary? what is to be said to support the charge against me? bring forth your strong reasons if you can, and prove what is asserted:

are not your ways unequal? it is plain they are; your actions, your course of life, are manifest deviations from my law, and from all the rules of righteousness and goodness; it is you that are in the wrong, and I in the right.

Ver. 26. *When a righteous [man] turneth away from his righteousness, &c.]* This is repeated for the further confirmation of it, and to raise their attention to it; to make it more plain and manifest to them, and to fix it upon their minds:

and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them: or, “he shall die for them”^{f272}; both for his turning away from his righteousness, and for his committing iniquity:

for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die; in both respects. This is repeated to denote the certainty of it.

Ver. 27. *Again, when the wicked [man] turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, &c.]* Repents of his sins, and forsakes the vicious course of life he has lived:

and doeth that which is lawful and right; or “judgment” and “righteousness”^{f273}; that which is agreeable to the law and will of God, and is just and right between man and man:

he shall save his soul alive; from famine, pestilence, the sword, or captivity; he shall be preserved, and not be involved in calamities and distress: or, “shall quicken his own soul”^{f274}; which, in a spiritual sense, is only done by the Spirit and grace of God, and not by man himself; nor is the enjoyment of eternal life by the works of men, but through the grace of God, and righteousness of Christ.

Ver. 28. *Because he considereth, &c.]* Being come to himself, and in his right mind, he considers the evil of his ways; what they lead to; what they deserve at the hand of God; and what he may expect, should he continue in them; (see ²⁸⁸⁴Ezekiel 18:14);

and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed; not only repents of them, but reforms from them; and that not from one, or a few of them, but from them “all”; which shows the truth, reality, and sincerity of his repentance; there being a change of mind, a change of actions and conversation follows:

he shall surely live, he shall not die; (see Gill on “²⁸⁸²Ezekiel 18:21”). Jerom interprets the just man turning from his righteousness, of the Jews leaving the author of righteousness, denying the son of God, and smiting

the heir; and the wicked man turning from his wickedness, of the Gentiles, and of their conversion of faith.

Ver. 29. *Yet saith the house of Israel, the way of the Lord is not equal,* &c.] Though the case was put so many ways, and the thing was made so clear and plain, by the instances given; as, if a man was a just man, let his father be what he would, he should live; but, if his son was a wicked man, he should die; yet, if his son should do well, he should not die for his father's sins, his father only should suffer for his iniquity; and then again, on the one hand, if a seemingly righteous man become an apostate, he should be treated as such; but, on the other hand, if a wicked man repented and reformed, things would go well with him; by all which it most clearly appeared that God did not, and would not, punish children for the sins of their fathers, unless they themselves were guilty of the same; and that the methods of Providence in dealing with men in this world, as they were good or bad, were equal and right, and to be justified:

O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?
This is an appeal to their own consciences, upon the evidence before given.

Ver. 30. *Therefore will I judge you, O house of Israel,* &c.] The case being fairly stated, the charge removed, instances to the contrary given, the Lord, as Judge, proceeds to bring the controversy to an issue, and to pass the definitive sentence, and to deal with them in the way of his providence as they deserved:

everyone according to his ways, saith the Lord God; not according to the ways of their father, but according to their own ways: this refers, not to the last and general judgment, but to some sore temporal punishment, which God, as the righteous Judge, would inflict upon them for their sins, according to the just desert of them; but whereas, notwithstanding all their wickedness, insolence, and blasphemy, the Lord was desirous of showing mercy to them, rather than proceed to strict justice; he exhorts and advises them to the following things:

repent, and turn [yourselves] from all your transgressions; this is to be understood of a national repentance for national sins, to prevent national judgments, being an address to the whole house of Israel; and not of evangelical repentance, which is the gift of God, and of an external reformation, as the fruit of it; and not of the first work of internal conversion, which is by the powerful and efficacious grace of God; though,

were both exhorted to, it would not prove that these are in the power of men, only show the want and necessity of them, and so be the means of God's bringing his chosen people to them. The phrase, "yourselves", is not in the original; both words used signify "to turn"; and may be rendered and explained thus, "turn" yourselves, and "cause [others] to turn"^{f275}; let every man turn himself from his evil courses, and do all he can to turn his brother, or his neighbour, from the same; so Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech interpret them. The Targum is,

"turn you to my worship, and remove from you the worship of idols:"

so iniquity shall not be your ruin; meaning temporal ruin, as it deserved, and they were threatened with; and which might be prevented by repentance and reformation: or, "shall not be a stumbling block to you"^{f276}; an hinderance, an obstruction in the way of their enjoyment of temporal blessings.

Ver. 31. *Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, &c.*] As unprofitable and pernicious, to be abhorred and abstained from, and to be cast off, as loads and burdens upon them. Kimchi interprets it of the punishment of their sins, which might be cast off, or escaped, by repentance; perhaps it is best to interpret it of the casting away of their idols, by which they transgressed; (see ^{צו}Ezekiel 20:7,8);

and make you a new heart and a new spirit; which the Lord elsewhere promises to give, and he does give to his own elect; (see Gill on ^{צו}Ezekiel 11:19"); and if here to be understood of a regenerated heart and spirit, in which are new principles of light, life, and love, grace and holiness, it will not prove that it is in the power of man to make himself such a heart and spirit; since from God's command, to man's power, is no argument; and the design of the exhortation is to convince men of their want of such a heart; of the importance of it: and which, through the efficacious grace of God, may be a means of his people having it, seeing he has in covenant promised it to them. The Targum renders it,

"a fearing heart, and a spirit of fear;"

that is, a heart and spirit to fear, serve, and worship the Lord, and not idols; and so the amount of the exhortation is, yield a hearty reverential obedience to the living God, and not to dumb idols; or that they would be

hearty and sincere in their national repentance and reformation they are here pressed unto:

for why will ye die, O house of Israel? which is to be understood, not of an eternal death; since the deaths here spoken of was now upon them, what they were complaining of, and from which they might be recovered, (^{<388D>}Ezekiel 18:2,23); but temporal calamity and affliction, as in (^{<4010>}2 Corinthians 1:10 11:23); and so in the following words.

Ver. 32. *For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth,* &c.] Which is not to be interpreted simply and absolutely, and with respect to all persons afflicted and punished by him; for he does take delight in the exercise of “judgment” and “righteousness”, and “laughs” at the “calamity” of wicked men, (^{<2492>}Jeremiah 9:24 ^{<3103>}Proverbs 1:26); but comparatively, as in (^{<2886>}Hosea 5:6). The sense is, that he takes no pleasure in the afflictions, calamities, and captivity of men, which are meant by death here; but rather that they would repent and reform, and live in their own land, and enjoy the good things of it; which shows the mercy and compassion of God to sinners:

wherefore, he renews his exhortation,

turn [yourselves], and live ye; or, “ye shall live”^{f277}; I take no delight in your present deaths, your captivity; it would be more agreeable to me would you turn from your evil ways to the Lord your God, and behave according to the laws I have given you to walk by, and so live in your own land, in the quiet possession of your goods and estates.