

# CHAPTER 20

## INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 20

The prophecy in this chapter is occasioned by some of the elders of Israel coming to inquire of the Lord; when the prophet is bid to tell them that he would not be inquired of by them. The reason of which were their abominations he is ordered to make known unto them, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:1-4); and then proceeds the narration of them; first of what their fathers committed in Egypt; of God's goodness to them, and their ingratitude; how that though he promised and swore that he would bring them from thence, when he charged them to abstain from the idolatry of that people where they were, nevertheless they did not, for which he threatened them with his wrath to consume them; yet such was his goodness as to spare them, and bring them out of that land, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:5-9); being brought out of Egypt into the wilderness, the Lord gave them statutes and ordinances to observe, particularly sabbaths, as a sign between him and them, but these they despised and broke; wherefore the Lord threatened to consume them in the wilderness, and not bring them into the land of Canaan; yet such was his kindness and mercy to them, that he did not make an utter end of them in the wilderness, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:10-17); and whereas he exhorted their posterity not to imitate their parents, but to walk in his statutes and judgments, and observe his sabbaths, yet they would not; which drew out his resentment against them, and he threatened to scatter them among the Heathens; but, for his name's sake, that that might not be polluted among the heathen, he spared them, and did not cut them off, only gave them up to do things very pernicious to them, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:18-26); and even when they were brought into the land of Canaan, they were guilty of blasphemy against God, and of idolatry on every high hill they saw, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:27-29); but whereas it might be objected, what is all this to the present generation? it is observed, that they imitated their fathers, and were guilty of the same idolatries, and therefore the Lord would not be inquired of by them, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:30,31); and threatens to rule them with fury, and plead with them, as he had pleaded with their fathers in the wilderness, (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 20:32-36); nevertheless he suggests that there would be a remnant among them, when he should have purged the rebels

and transgressors from them, that he would deal graciously with in a covenant way; who should serve him in his holy mountain, where he would require and accept their sacrifices, in whom he would be sanctified; and who should know him, and loathe themselves, when made sensible of the distinguishing favours bestowed upon them, (<sup>318</sup>Ezekiel 20:37-44); and the chapter is closed with a prophecy dropped against Jerusalem, denouncing utter destruction on it, (<sup>319</sup>Ezekiel 20:45-49).

**Ver. 1.** *And it came to pass in the seventh year, &c.*] Of Zedekiah's reign, and of the captivity of Jeconiah; from whence the dates of Ezekiel's visions and prophecies are taken, (<sup>320</sup>Ezekiel 1:2 8:1); two years, one month, and five days, after Ezekiel began to prophesy, and eleven months and five days after the preceding prophecy:

*in the fifth [month], the tenth [day] of the month;* the month Ab, which answers to our July and August; on this day afterwards Jerusalem was twice destroyed, first by the Chaldeans, and then by the Romans:

*[that] certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord;* by the prophet; these were either some of the elders that were carried captive, who came to inquire how long they should continue in this state; or what methods they should use to free themselves from it; or what they should do while they were in it; whether it would be advisable that they should conform to the customs of the Heathens among whom they were; or what would be the case of those that were left in Judea: or else these were sent by Zedekiah to pay the king of Babylon his tax, or to negotiate some affair with him relating to the captives; and who took this opportunity of consulting the Lord by the prophet what methods should be taken to throw off the yoke, and to know what was the mind of God in it; but these things are uncertain, as are also the persons the inquirers; though the Jews say<sup>f289</sup> they were Ananias, Azarias, and Misael; which is not probable, since they were good men, whereas these seem to be hypocritical persons:

*and sat before me;* with great seriousness and devotion seemingly, waiting for an answer.

**Ver. 2.** *Then came the word of the Lord unto me, &c.*] While the elders were sitting before him, by an impulse upon his mind, dictating things unto him:

*saying:* as follows:

**Ver. 3.** *Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, &c.]* Give them this for an answer from me:

*thus saith the Lord God, are ye come to inquire of me?* no; not seriously, heartily, and in good earnest, determining to abide by the advice and counsel that might be given; or how can you have the face to inquire of me, when guilty of such abominations?

*[as] I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you;* knowing their wickedness and hypocrisy, which were detestable to him, and therefore would not hear what they had to say, nor give them any answer, or direct them what they should do. Sad is the case of persons when the Lord will not be inquired of by them! it is plain he has no favours to bestow upon them; for, when he has, he will put them upon inquiring of him for them, to do them unto them, (<sup>2865</sup>Ezekiel 36:37); this was the case of Saul, whom God, when he inquired of him, would not answer in any of his usual ways, (<sup>4926</sup>1 Samuel 28:6).

**Ver. 4.** *Wilt thou judge them, son of man? &c.]* Excuse them, patronise them, defend their cause, and plead for them? surely thou wilt not; or rather, wilt thou not reprove and correct them, judge and condemn them, for their sins and wickedness? this thou oughtest to do:

*wilt thou judge [them]?* this is repeated, to show the vehemency of the speaker, and the duty of the prophet:

*cause them to know the abominations of their fathers:* the sins they committed, which were abominable in themselves, and rendered them abominable unto God, and what came upon them for them; by which they would be led to see the abominable evils which they also had been guilty of, in which they had imitated their fathers, and what they had reason to expect in consequence of them.

**Ver. 5.** *And say unto them, thus saith the Lord God, &c.]* Here begins the account of their fathers; of God's unmerited goodness to them, and of their sins and transgressions against him, and how it fared with them:

*in the day when I chose Israel;* to be his peculiar people, above all people on the face of the earth; when he declared his choice of them, and made it appear that he had chosen them, and distinguished them, by special blessings and favours bestowed on them:

*and lifted up mine hand to the seed of the house of Jacob*; the posterity of Jacob or Israel, to whom the Lord swore that he would do such and such things for them; of which the lifting up the hand was a token; it is a gesture used in swearing, (<sup>27117</sup>Daniel 12:7); and so the Targum,

“and I swore unto them by my word:”

*and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt*: by his name Jehovah; by the prophets he sent unto them, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; and by the miracles he wrought among them:

*when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I [am] the Lord your God*: making promise of it, declaring it unto them, confirming it with an oath; (see <sup>3167</sup>Hebrews 6:17,18).

**Ver. 6.** *In the day [that] I lifted up my hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt, &c.*] Not only promised and swore to it, but exerted his power in the miracles he wrought, by bringing plagues upon the Egyptians, to oblige them to let them go forth from thence:

*into a land that I had espied for them*; which he had in his eye and in his heart for them; which he had in his mind provided for them, and was determined in his purposes to bring them to; and which he, as it were, looked out for them, and singled out as the best and most suitable for them:

*flowing with milk and honey*; a phrase often used, to express the fruitfulness of the land, of Canaan, and the great plenty of provisions in it:

*which [is] the glory of all lands*; that is, either which fertility, signified by milk and honey, is the glory of all lands, or makes all countries desirable where they are found; or else, which land of Canaan, being so fruitful, is more glorious or desirable than any other country; it greatly surpassing all others in its situation, soil, and climate. The Targum is,

“which is the praise of all provinces;”

that is, was praised and commended by the inhabitants of all other provinces for the plenty in it; which must needs be very great, to support so large a number of inhabitants in it, and yet its compass but small.

**Ver. 7.** *Then I said unto them, &c.*] Having promised and swore to do such great and good things for them; which must lay them under an

obligation to regard what he should command them: promises and blessings of goodness are great incentives to duty, and lay under great obligation to it:

*cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes*; which should be so, meaning idols; but which his eyes were taken with, and were lifted up unto, as his gods; though they ought to have been rejected with the utmost abhorrence, as abominable:

*and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt*; their “dunghill gods”, as the word<sup>f290</sup> signifies; which to worship, as it was an abomination to God, was defiling to themselves; yet these they were fond of, and prone to worship them; their eyes and their hearts were after them; and they needed such cautions and instructions as these, backed with the following strong reason against such idolatry:

*I [am] the Lord your God*; their Creator and Benefactor, their covenant God; the only Lord God, and whom only they ought to serve and worship; to whom they were under ten thousand obligations; and who was infinitely above all the idols of Egypt.

**Ver. 8.** *But they rebelled against me*, &c.] All sin is rebellion against God, an act of hostility, especially idolatry; it is refusing homage and casting off allegiance to him:

*and would not hearken unto me*; to his word by his prophets; so the Targum,

“they rebelled against my word, and would not receive my prophets:”

*they did not every man cast away the abominations of his eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of the Gentiles*; whence it appears that there were some among them that did give in to the idolatry of the Egyptians; and could not be prevailed upon to relinquish it, notwithstanding the favours shown them, and the promises made unto them. The Jewish writers, Jarchi and Kimchi, say that there were many of these wicked men among the Israelites when Moses was sent to them; and that they died in the time of the three days’ darkness, so that the Egyptians did not see their fall, and rejoice at it;

*then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them*; he threatened them, by his prophets, that he would bring down deserved wrath upon them, like a mighty shower of rain:

*to accomplish mine anger against them*; to bring it upon them to the utmost, and consume them with it:

*in the midst of the land of Egypt*; and so not bring them forth from thence, as he had promised; but cut them off in it, for their sins and rebellions.

**Ver. 9.** *But I wrought for my name's sake, &c.*] In a way of grace and mercy; did well by thorn, did what he promised to do; not for any merits of theirs, but for his own honour, and the glory of his name:

*that it should not be polluted before the Heathen, among whom they [were]*; be spoken evil of, which is a polluting it; saying, either that he was not true to his word, in not doing what he promised; or else that it was not in his power to perform; either of which would reflect dishonour on his name, and so defile it:

*in whose sight I made myself known unto them*; by the wonders he wrought; and who, by one means or another, became acquainted with the promises of God to Israel, that he would bring them out of Egypt, and settle them in the land of Canaan: wherefore for the honour of his name he exerted his power,

*in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt*; as he did, as follows:

**Ver. 10.** *Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, &c.*] It was the Lord that brought them out from thence with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; that obliged Pharaoh to let them go, and gave them favour in the eyes of the Egyptians, that they went out unmolested by them:

*and brought them into the wilderness*; before they went into the land of Canaan; here they had freedom from their bondage, and were in a wonderful manner provided for by the Lord, guided, supported, preserved, and at last brought to the promised land.

**Ver. 11.** *And I gave them my statutes, &c.*] The precepts of his law, the law on Mount Sinai, of which there were not the like among other nations; nor were they given unto them, but were a special gift unto Israel, and greatly to be valued, (<sup>4918</sup>Deuteronomy 4:8 <sup>4979</sup>Psalm 147:19,20 19:8-10);

*and showed them judgments*: the nature, use, and excellency of the the necessity and advantage of observing them: the same as before, called “statutes”, because appointed, fixed, and certain, being of inviolable and lasting obligation; and “judgments”, being according to strict justice and equity: these, though they were originally written on man’s heart, yet so obliterated by sin that there was need not only of their being afresh written and published, but of their being taught and made known; or of pointing out the use of them, and obligation to them:

*which [if] a man do, he shall live in them*; or “by them”<sup>f291</sup>; in the land of Canaan, enjoying all the blessings of a long and happy life: reference seems to be had to (<sup><8885></sup>Leviticus 18:5). The Targum adds,

“in eternal life;”

but eternal life is not to be obtained by the works of the law, since no man can perfectly obey or fulfil it, but is the pure gift of the grace of God.

**Ver. 12.** *Moreover, also, I gave them my sabbaths*, &c.] The Targum is,

“the days of the sabbaths;”

or sabbath days, the seventh day sabbaths, which recurring throughout the year are many; but, besides these, there were the year of remission, for the seventh year sabbath; and the jubilee year, the great sabbath of all, once in fifty years; yea, Kimchi thinks the feasts, such as the passover, &c. are included: now these are distinguished from the statutes and judgments, or the precepts of the law, which were of a moral nature; these being ritual and ceremonial, and were peculiar to the Jews, and continued but for a while; however, they were gifts, and valuable ones, of considerable use and significance:

*to be a sign between me and them*; of his being their God, and they being his people; of his favour and good will to them, and of the obligations they were under to him; of his having separated and distinguished them from all other nations of the world; these sabbaths being only given to them as a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt, and as a pledge of their entering into the land of rest; and of the future rest to be enjoyed by Christ, and in heaven, to all eternity; for these were shadows of things to come, (<sup><5126></sup>Colossians 2:16,17);

*that they might know that I [am] the Lord that sanctify them*; separate them from other nations, and, by such means and opportunities, begin and carry on the work of sanctification in them; for the sabbaths, and the services of them, were useful to such purposes; as Lord's days, and the work of them, are now.

**Ver. 13.** *But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness,* &c.] Where they were wholly at the mercy of God, entirely dependent upon him; and miracles were wrought every day for the sustaining and preservation of, them from famine, wild beasts, and enemies; yet they rebelled against the Lord; provoked him bitterly by their manifold transgressions, their ingratitude, unbelief, and idolatry; and this not a few of them only, but the whole body of the people, the house of Israel, the whole family, and that for the space of forty years, (<sup><1989></sup>Psalm 95:9,10);

*they walked not in my statutes*; did not make them the rule of their walk and conversation, and steer the course of their lives and actions by them, as they ought to have done:

*and they despised my judgments*; as not worthy their notice and regard, as useless and unprofitable; nay, had an aversion to them, and a loathing of them, as the word<sup>f292</sup> signifies; such is the corrupt and wicked heart of man; it is enmity against God and his law, and all that is good:

*which [if] a man do, he shall even live in them*; (see Gill on "<sup><3311></sup>Ezekiel 20:11");

*and my sabbaths they greatly polluted*; or "profaned", or "[made them] common"<sup>f293</sup>; that is, with other days; by going out for manna on them; by gathering sticks upon them; by doing their own work, speaking their own words, and seeking their own pleasure, and worshipping false deities:

*then I said, I would pour out, my fury upon them in the wilderness to consume them*; that they should not enter into the land of Canaan; as the generation that came out of Egypt were consumed in the wilderness, excepting two; as the Lord threatened, (<sup><0445></sup>Numbers 14:35).

**Ver. 14.** *But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the Heathen,* &c.] (See Gill on "<sup><3311></sup>Ezekiel 20:9"); who would be ready to say it was for want of power, or faithfulness, or, goodness, that he did not bring them into the promised land; or there was no such land to bring them to God's own glory was concerned, and that is his ultimate end



in all he does; and is of more weight with him than any other argument whatever:

*in whose sight I brought them out*; from Egypt, into the wilderness; this was done publicly in the sight of the Egyptians, they urging them to be gone.

**Ver. 15.** *Yet also I lifted up mine hand unto them in the wilderness, &c.]* Swore unto them, as in (<sup>3516</sup>Ezekiel 20:5,6);

*that I would not bring them into the land which I had given [them]*; by promise to their fathers, and to them. This is to be understood of the generation that came out of Egypt, that received the ill report the spies made, and murmured against the Lord; wherefore he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest; or he would not bring them into the land of Canaan, save Caleb and Joshua; and accordingly none else entered but them, though their posterity did; and so both his oath to them, that they should not enter, and his oath to Abraham, that he would give to his seed the land, had their accomplishment, (<sup>0423</sup>Numbers 14:23,24,30); a land

*flowing with milk and honey, which [is] the glory of all lands*; (see Gill on “<sup>3516</sup>Ezekiel 20:6”).

**Ver. 16.** *Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths, &c.]* Which were just causes of divine resentment and anger; (see Gill on “<sup>3513</sup>Ezekiel 20:13”);

*for their heart went after their idols*; which they had served in Egypt; and that led them off from the true worship and service of God; no man can serve two masters; if he holds to the one, and his heart is towards him, he will despise the other; and yet these idols were no other, as the word signifies, than dunghill gods, as in (<sup>3516</sup>Ezekiel 20:16); and such are all worldly things, in comparison of God, that the heart of man is going after.

**Ver. 17.** *Nevertheless, mine eye spared them from destroying them, &c.]* Utterly, so as to leave neither root nor branch; for though the whole generation died excepting two, either by the immediate hand of God in wrath, or else by ordinary deaths; yet there was a generation raised up in their stead, to whom mercy was shown:

*neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness*; that they should be no more a nation and people; though the carcasses of them that believed not

fell in the wilderness, and never saw the good land, yet their posterity was spared to see it, and did.

**Ver. 18.** *But I said unto their children in the wilderness, &c.*] Or, “then I said”<sup>f294</sup>; his judgments and statutes being neglected and despised by them, and good instructions and kind providences being of no use unto them, the Lord turns to their posterity while yet in the wilderness: what follows seems to refer to those directions, instructions, and exhortations given in the book of Deuteronomy by Moses, in the plains of Moab, a little before the children of Israel went over Jordan into the land of Canaan:

*walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments*; they were not only not to imitate their parents in their open sins and transgressions of God’s law; but they were not to follow them in the observance of such rules of worship, which were of their own devising, and they had formed into a law: this makes greatly against such who think it a very heinous sin to relinquish the religion of their ancestors, or that in which they were brought up; but if this does not appear to be according to the word of God, the statutes and judgments of our fathers should stand for nothing, yea, should be rejected:

*nor defile yourselves with their idols*; idolatry, as it is abominable to God, is defiling to men, and renders them loathsome to him; and it being what their fathers practised will not excuse them; for, as it was defiling to their fathers, it is no less so to their children.

**Ver. 19.** *I [am] the Lord your God, &c.*] Not only that had made them and preserved them, but had chose them above all people to be his people; who had made a covenant with them, and had distinguished them by his favours from all others:

*walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them*; which he had given unto their fathers, and they had neglected and despised; those contained in the decalogue, and in the whole book of Deuteronomy, and elsewhere,

**Ver. 20.** *And hallow my sabbaths, &c.*] Or keep them holy, by abstaining from worldly business on them; by observing all the duties of religion, private and public, to be performed on such days:

*and they shall be a sign between me and you*; of present and future good; (see Gill on “<sup>2502</sup>Ezekiel 20:12”);

*that ye may know that I [am] the Lord your God*; not only acknowledge him to be the Lord their God, by observing his laws, and sanctifying his sabbaths; but also have a larger experience of his grace and goodness, as their covenant God.

**Ver. 21.** *Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me*, &c.] After the death of their fathers, when they were come into the plains of Moab, and just going to enter the land; they rebelled against the Lord, and greatly provoked him, by joining themselves to Baalpeor, the idol of Moab, they worshipped, (<sup>0428</sup>Numbers 25:3);

*they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them*; they did as their fathers before them; though they saw with their eyes the judgments of God upon them, yet this did not deter them from following their evil ways:

*which [if] a man do, he shall even live in them*; (see Gill on "<sup>0433</sup>Ezekiel 20:13");

*they polluted my sabbaths*; just as their fathers had done, taking no warning by them, and what befell them:

*then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish mine anger against them in the wilderness*; twenty and four thousand died on account of the idolatry of Baalpeor, (<sup>0439</sup>Numbers 25:9).

**Ver. 22.** *Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand*, &c.] When it was stretched out against them, as in the above instance, and did not utterly consume them. The Targum is,

“and I turned away the stroke of my might:”

*and wrought for my name’s sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth*. (See Gill on "<sup>0440</sup>Ezekiel 20:9”) and (see Gill on "<sup>0444</sup>Ezekiel 20:14”).

**Ver. 23.** *I lifted up mine hand also to them in the wilderness*, &c.] Swore unto them, as in (<sup>0445</sup>Ezekiel 20:5,6,15);

*that I would scatter them among the Heathen, and disperse them through the countries*; after they came to be settled in the land of Canaan, they sinning against the Lord; which was fulfilled in the times of the Babylonish captivity, and in their destruction by the Romans; but was threatened and

foretold while they were in the wilderness, (<sup><1373></sup>Leviticus 26:33) (<sup><1325></sup>Deuteronomy 32:26); with this compare (<sup><1465></sup>Psalms 106:26-30).

**Ver. 24.** *Because they had not executed my judgments, &c.]* Had not done that which was right and just, as the Lord commanded them:

*but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths;* as their fathers had done:

*and their eyes were after their fathers' idols;* which they had learned to serve in Egypt, or brought with them from thence; these the eyes and the hearts of their children were after, as theirs find been; and they were more desirous, encouraged, and emboldened to serve them, because they were their fathers'; but this would not excuse their sin; yea, it was rather an aggravation of it, that they should follow them in such practices, for which they had been often reprov'd and punished.

**Ver. 25.** *Wherefore I gave them also statutes [that were] not good, &c.]*

Yea, were very bad; not the moral law, and the statutes of it; for that is holy, just, and good, though the killing letter and ministration of condemnation and death to the transgressors of it; indeed those laws were both good and bad to different persons, as Abendana observes; good to those that observed them, but not good to those that transgressed them, the issue of which was death: rather these were the statutes and rites of the ceremonial law, which were not in their own nature good; nor did they arise from the nature and holiness of God, but from his will; and though very good and useful under the legal dispensation, until the Messiah came, especially when attended to by faith, and with a view to him; yet had the sanction of death to many of them, that a man could not live by them: but it may be, the punishments inflicted on them for their sins, by the plague, by fire, and by serpents, are meant; which may be called "statutes" and "judgments", because ordered and appointed by the Lord, and according to justice: or, as many, both Jews and Christians, think, the idolatrous laws, usages, and customs of other nations, the traditions of their fathers, their wicked laws and statutes, and their own; which, being left to a reprobate mind, they were suffered to walk in, to their hurt and ruin; which is sometimes the sense of the word give; and so here, he "gave", that is, he permitted them to observe such statutes; and this sense is countenanced and confirmed by (<sup><1315></sup>Ezekiel 20:26); to which agrees Jarchi's note,

“I delivered them into the hand of their imagination (or corrupt nature) to stumble at their iniquity;”

(see <sup><4128></sup>Romans 1:28). Kimchi interprets them of laws, decrees, tribute, and taxes, imposed upon them by their enemies that conquered them. The Targum is,

“and I also, when they rebelled against my word, and would not obey my prophets, cast them far off, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies; and they went after their foolish imagination, and made decrees which were not right:”

*and judgments, whereby they should not live*; yea, which were deadly and destructive to them; which brought ruin, destruction, and death upon them; for more is designed than is expressed: this was the effect of following the customs of the nations, and of walking in the statutes of their fathers, and of their own; whereas, had they walked according to the judgments and statutes of God, moral and ceremonial, they had lived comfortably and prosperously.

**Ver. 26.** *And one polluted them in their own gifts, &c.*] Suffered them to defile themselves; or declared them to be, and treated them as polluted persons, in the gifts and sacrifices which they offered to idols, particularly their firstborn: as the next clause explains it:

*in that they caused to pass though [the fire] all that openeth the womb*; this very likely they did, when they sacrificed to Baalpeor, the same with Molech, (<sup><4218></sup>Numbers 25:3);

*that I might make them desolate*; their families, by stripping them of their children, their firstborn, and strength:

*to the end that they might know that I [am] the Lord*; a righteous God, in punishing men for sin, in a way it deserves. Some interpret this, not of causing the firstborn to pass through fire to an idol; but of causing them to pass, or of setting them apart, to the Lord, according to the law in (<sup><4212></sup>Exodus 13:12); where the same word is used as here; and the sense is that God declared them to be impure in or with all their gifts, by commanding them to cause their firstborn to pass to him, which they were obliged to redeem; which sense is approved of by Gussetius<sup>1295</sup>; and so Abendana, taking the words to refer to both, gives this sense of them,

“I pronounced them impure, and removed them far from me, instead of sanctifying them; because they caused everyone that opens the womb to pass from me, whom I commanded to give to me for holiness, but they have given them to idolatry;”

rather, according to Braunius<sup>f296</sup>, the words may be understood of God’s rejecting and causing the firstborn to pass from him, and not suffering them to offer gifts and sacrifices unto him; which may be meant by pronouncing them impure, or polluting them in their gifts; this was after the worship of the golden calf; when he took Aaron and his sons in their room.

**Ver. 27.** *Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, &c.*] The elders of Israel, (<sup><301></sup>Ezekiel 20:1); who came in the name of the whole body, and represented them, and by whom the following message is sent unto them; or the prophet by them might speak unto them, as he is ordered:

*thus saith the Lord God, yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me;* besides what they did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, when they were come into the land of Canaan, such was their ingratitude, that to all the rest they added this wickedness, to sacrifice to other gods on every high hill, and in all thick trees; which was a blaspheming the name of God, and casting reproach upon him:

*in that they have committed a trespass against me;* idolatry is meant, described in (<sup><318></sup>Ezekiel 20:28); and which they committed, not through ignorance and weakness, but voluntarily, against light and knowledge; and obstinately, notwithstanding all the remonstrances made unto them, and cautions, exhortations, and reproofs given them.

**Ver. 28.** *[For] when I had brought them into the land, &c.*] Brought them out of Egypt through the wilderness into the land of Canaan, through so many difficulties, by such displays of power, goodness, and truth:

*[for] the which I lifted up mine band to give it to them;* which he swore he would give unto them, and which he did, and so fulfilled his word and oath; and which was an instance of his bounty and goodness; and not owing to any merits of theirs; which he did, and so fulfilled his word and oath; and which was an instance of his bounty and goodness, and not owing to any merits of theirs:

*then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees*; as soon as they had got into the land, and took a view of it, they at once fixed their eyes upon the high hills and groves, as proper places to set up their idols on, and perform idolatrous worship in; in the one place more openly, and in the other more secretly, as they might judge proper and necessary; in which they imitated the Heathens, who had their temples, idols, altars, and sacrifices, amidst groves and thick trees. So Herodotus<sup>f297</sup> relates of the temple of Diana at Bubastis in Egypt, that at the entrance of it there were rivulets from the Nile, which flowed about it here and there, shaded with trees; and within were a vast grove of the largest trees, planted about the temple; and which he afterwards calls trees reaching to heaven:

*and they offered there their sacrifices*; either to the God of Israel, as some of them sometimes did, and which was sinful; for though they might offer sacrifices, as were commanded, to a right object, yet not in the proper place: or rather to their idols; and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions, *to their own gods*; which they had made to themselves, and had chose and approved of:

*and there they presented the provocation of their offering*; or their offering which provoked the wrath of God against them; being such as either he had not appointed, or was offered in a wrong place, or the wrong object; than which nothing could be more provoking to him; it was giving his glory to another, and his praise to graven images:

*there also they made their sweet saviour*; incense to their deities. The Targum is the worship of their sacrifices:

*and poured out there their drink offerings*; libations of wine: all kind of sacrifices were offered up here by them; which shows to what lengths in idolatry they ran, and how dreadfully guilty they were.

**Ver. 29.** *Then I said unto them*, &c.] By his prophets that he sent unto them:

*what is the high place where, unto you go?* what is the name of it? what is the use of it? to what end do you go there? is there not an altar built by my order and command to sacrifice upon is this high place better than that? does it answer a better end and purpose?

*and the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day*; or a high place. The Septuagint also leaves the word untranslated, and calls it Abama; and the Arabic version Abbana; so they called their altars after the Gentiles, by whom they are called **βωμοι**; nor were they ashamed of it, but persisted in so calling them, from the first use of them to the present time. These are often called, Bamah and Bamot in the books of Kings. Jarchi says it is a term of reproach, as if it was said, Bamah---in what is it to be accounted of?

**Ver. 30.** *Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God,* &c.] To the elders, as before:

*are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers?* they were: *and commit ye whoredoms after their abominations?* spiritual adultery; that is, idolatry, in the same abominable manner? they did, as appears by what follows:

**Ver. 31.** *For when ye offer your gifts,* &c.] And sacrifices to idols. The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it,

*the firstfruits of your gifts*; it may design their firstborn; (see <sup>AMB</sup>Ezekiel 20:26) as the following clause seems to explain it:

*when ye make your sons to pass through the fire*; or between two fires to Moloch, as their fathers had done before them;

*ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day*; by worshipping idols, or dunghill gods, as the word signifies, as often observed; they defiled themselves with those filthy things, which they continued to do to that very day, and so became more and more polluted; and were as their fathers had been, and therefore must expect to be used in like manner:

*and shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel?* can you think that I will suffer you to come and inquire of me or to make your requests to me? or can you hope to have an answer from me; at least a favourable one, such as you could wish for?

*as I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you*; so confirming again with an oath what he had before declared, (<sup>AMB</sup>Ezekiel 20:3), wherefore they might assure themselves that they would not be acceptable to him, neither their persons nor petitions, or be regarded by him.



**Ver. 32.** *And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, &c.*] What they had contrived in their own breasts, and laid a plan of, and would gladly have brought about, should be frustrated, take no effect, and come to nothing:

*that ye say, we will be as the Heathen;* live without God; not be in subjection to him, or under his government, or be called by his name, or attend to his word, worship, and ordinances; but join ourselves to them; enter into alliance, and intermarry with them; carry on trade and commerce with them, and embrace the same religion; and then we shall prosper as they do, as well as no more incur the reproach of singularity or preciseness in religion:

*as the families of the countries:* being incorporated into them, dwelling with them, and joining with them in the same exercises of religious worship:

*to serve wood and stone;* images made of wood and stone. Strange! that a people that had a revelation from God, and such an experience of his power and goodness, should ever form such a scheme, or once think of entering into such measures, so grossly absurd and scandalous.

**Ver. 33.** *As I live, saith the Lord God, &c.*] The form of an oath; the Lord swears by his own life, used more than once before; it supposes something of moment, and the certain performance of it:

*surely with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm;* from which none can escape, and which none can withstand:

*and with fury poured out:* like floods of water, in a violent hasty shower of rain; it denotes the abundance of divine wrath, and the sudden and sure execution of it:

*will I rule over you;* not in a gentle and merciful way, but with great rigour and severity; though they had contrived to withdraw themselves from under his domination and government, by joining with the Gentiles, and conforming to their laws and customs, and complying with their religious rites and idolatrous practices; yet they should not be able to accomplish their designs; they should be so far from being free men, as they promised themselves, that whereas they did not choose to be his voluntary and faithful subjects, he would keep a watchful eye and a strict hand over them as rebels, and rule them with a rod of iron, as well as with a sceptre of

righteousness; and would be King over them, and they should be subject to his authority, whether they would or not.

**Ver. 34.** *I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, &c.*] The Egyptians, Ammonites, and others; where they went for safety and protection, and among whom they intended to settle, and had formed a scheme to cast off the yoke of God and his worship, and be no more a nation or people under his government; but mix themselves with these nations, and become a part of them, and join with them in all matters, civil, commercial, and religious; but here the Lord will not suffer them to continue, but will bring them out from hence:

*with a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out:* as before, (<sup>20:33</sup>Ezekiel 20:33) though some think this is to be understood as a favour to the Israelites, who should be brought out of the countries of the idolatrous Gentiles by mighty power, and with marks of wrath and displeasure upon the nations; designing hereby the good of his people, that they might be reduced to his government, and live happily and comfortably under him, and not be destroyed and lost among the nations.

**Ver. 35.** *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, &c.*] Into Babylon, and into captivity there, which they thought to avoid by fleeing to other countries. Some think that those inhospitable nations are meant, Syro-media, Caspia, Hyrcania, Iberia, and others, into which many of the Jews were brought, who sought to live elsewhere than at Babylon; and others are of opinion that this respects the time of their return from Babylon to their own land, between which lay a wilderness, here referred to; but perhaps the prophecy respects the present state of the Jews, in which they have continued ever since their destruction by the Romans; through whom they have been brought among the several nations of the world, particularly the Roman empire, compared to a wilderness; and represented as a populous one, as it is, and in which the beast, or antichrist, now is; (see <sup>17:3</sup>Revelation 17:3) and there will I plead with you face to face; judge, condemn, and take vengeance, or inflict punishment on them in the most public manner, as he now does. The Targum is, “and I will take vengeance on you face to face”.

**Ver. 36.** *Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, &c.*] Which was opposite the land of Egypt, near unto it, on the

borders of it; and into which the people immediately went, when they came out of Egypt, and passed the Red sea; and the Arabic version is,

“when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.”

This refers to the controversy the Lord had with the Israelites for murmuring upon the report of the spies; and the sentence he passed upon them, that they should not enter into the land of Canaan, but their carcasses should fall in the wilderness, (<sup>-04143</sup>Numbers 14:29,30):

*so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God*; take vengeance on them, as the Targum; who disbelieve the Messiah, reject him, and will not have him to reign over them; these are now punished, by a dispersion of them in the wilderness of the nations, where they die and perish, and see not their own land.

**Ver. 37.** *And I will cause you to pass under the rod, &c.]* That is, such whom God will not take vengeance on, and shall not die in the wilderness of the people; but whom he will have mercy on, and show favour to, and bring at length into their own land; these he indeed will bring under the rod of correction and chastisement, by which they shall be brought to a sense of sin, a confession of it, humiliation for it, and to seek to Christ for salvation from it; or under the rod of his word, the rod of his strength, he sends out of Zion the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation; by which they shall be brought to agree unto and comply with the way of salvation by Christ; to submit to his righteousness; to embrace the doctrines of the Gospel, and be subject to the ordinances of it: or the allusion is to shepherds, in taking an account of their flocks, or at the tithing of them, who strike and mark them with their rod, (<sup>-18273</sup>Leviticus 27:32 <sup>-43313</sup>Jeremiah 33:13), and thus, as the Lord has in election distinguished his sheep from others, taken an exact account of them, and set his seal or mark of foreknowledge on them; so in effectual calling he separates them from others, takes special knowledge of them, and sets his mark of sanctification on them. This will be the case of the converted Jews in the latter day:

*and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant*: or, “the discipline of the covenant”, as the Syriac Version; the same with the rod of correction, being what is provided in covenant for the good of the covenant ones. This covenant is the covenant of grace; the bond of which are not faith, repentance, and new obedience; for these are parts and blessings of the covenant; nor any outward ordinance; not circumcision formerly, nor

baptism and the Lord's supper now; which persons may submit to, and yet not be in the covenant: but it designs that which makes the covenant firm, sure, and lasting; which are the everlasting love of God, from whence it springs; his unchangeable counsel, according to which it proceeds; his solemn oath, that it shall never be removed; his faithfulness, which will not suffer it to be made void; and his power, which will accomplish every article of it; and the blood of Christ, which ratifies and confirms it. So Kimchi interprets it, "I will bind you in a covenant, that ye shall not go out of it for ever": or it is that which binds persons, or lays them under obligation to love, fear, and serve the Lord; and that is the love of God and Christ, and the exceeding great and precious promises of the covenant; and now into this sure, firm, and obliging covenant the Lord has brought all his chosen ones in eternity, when it was first made with Christ; and into which he may be said to bring them in time; as he will the converted Jews, when he manifests it to them, and applies the blessings and promises of it; shows them it, and their interest in it.

**Ver. 38.** *And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me, &c.*] All men are enemies, and enmity itself, against God; and every sin is an act of hostility and rebellion against him; every transgression and violation of his law is a casting off of allegiance to him, and a trampling upon and despising his legislative power and authority; wherefore rebels and transgressors of his law are put together; the one being explanative of the other. The people of the Jews were always more or less a rebellious people; so they were in the times of Moses, and all the while that he was with them, and were notoriously so in the times of Ezekiel; and therefore are often so described in this book; but they were not all so; such as were, the Lord here declares that he would single them out, as goats from among his sheep he brought under the rod, and purge them as chaff from the wheat; that sinners in Zion should be no more in the congregation of the righteous:

*I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn;* or "countries"; wherever they have been pilgrims and sojourners, as they now are; wherever they are; it looks as if, a little before or when the remnant of God, according to the election of his grace, shall be converted, that the rest shall be collected together into some one place, and be destroyed as rebels:

*and they shall not enter into the land of Israel*; when the converted Jews shall; an emblem of carnal Israelites, wicked professors, being not admitted into the New Jerusalem, and being excluded from the kingdom of heaven:

*and ye shall know that I am the Lord*; that knows all things, can do all things, and will faithfully and punctually perform all that is promised, threatened, or predicted.

**Ver. 39.** *As for you, O house of Israel, &c.*] The then present house of Israel, and the elders of it, who were upon the spot with the prophet:

*go ye, serve ye everyone his idols*; or dunghill gods; since they liked not to serve the true God: this is not giving them leave to serve idols, or approving their idolatrous practices; but is said “ironically”, as Kimchi and Ben Melech observe, who compare it with (<sup>21119</sup>Ecclesiastes 11:9):

*and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me*; not only serve them now, but for the future; seeing ye choose not to hearken to my voice, to obey my laws, and to worship me, and me only; for it suggests, that it was better to attend to the service of the one, or of the other, and not halt between two opinions; but either, if the God of Israel was the true God, then serve him, and him only; but if Baal, or any other Heathen deity, was so, then serve them, and keep serving them:

*but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts and with your idols*; to worship him along with them, and them along with him; to pretend they worshipped him in them, and offered their gifts and sacrifices to him through them; and so made use of his name as a cover to their idolatrous practices: this was a polluting his name, and was abominable to him.

**Ver. 40.** *For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, &c.*] Alluding to Mount Zion, or Moriah, on which the temple was built, on the highest part of the land of Israel, as Kimchi and Ben Melech observe; here the Gospel church is meant, comparable to a “mountain” for its firmness and durability; said to be a “holy” one, because consisting of holy persons, performing holy worship to a holy God; and represented as “high”, being established, as it will be in the latter day, upon the top of the mountains, and be very visible and glorious:

*there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me*: when all Israel shall be saved, or converted; and, the rebels and transgressors being purged away from them, they shall join themselves to the Gospel

church, and in it serve the Lord, according to the rules of the Gospel, and the ordinances of it; even all of them that shall enter into their own land and dwell in it; the rest being not admitted to it:

*there will I accept them*; their persons, and their sacrifices of prayer and praise, being offered up, in the name and faith of Christ, that altar which sanctities every gift; (see <sup>2307</sup>Isaiah 56:7):

*and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things*; meaning the offering up of their persons: bodies, and souls, as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice, which he would require of them as their reasonable service; together with all holy duties of prayer, praise, and beneficence; sacrifices with which God is well pleased through Christ and his sacrifice; and which are the only sacrifices he now requires under the Gospel dispensation; for ceremonial ones he does not require, seek after, enjoin, or accept; these are done away and made void by the sacrifice of his son; only it may be observed, as in other places and prophecies of Gospel times, that New Testament worship is expressed by the phrases, forms, and usages suited to the Old Testament; (see <sup>4016</sup>Psalms 40:6).

**Ver. 41.** *I will accept you with your sweet savour*, &c.] Their sins being expiated by the sacrifice of Christ, which is unto God for a sweet smelling savour; and their persons being, clothed with the robe of his righteousness, and the garments of his salvation, all whose garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia; the Gospel being the savour of life unto life unto them; and the savour of the knowledge of Christ being communicated to them by it; and also the savour of his good ointments, the graces of the Spirit, being imparted to them:

*when I bring you out of the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered*; which will not only be locally and literally true of them, when the Jews are converted, that they shall be collected together out of all nations where they now are dispersed, and return to their land; but spiritually also, they being effectually called out from among the, men of the world, and to leave their former company, customs, and lusts:

*and I will be sanctified in you before the Heathen*; the Gentiles, Christian men; who will take notice of the power, and grace, and goodness of God, in the conversion and restoration of them, and praise and glorify him on

account of it; and when he will be visibly feared, served, and worshipped, in the midst of them.

**Ver. 42.** *And ye shall know that I am the Lord, &c.*] The one only Jehovah, that keeps covenant; performs promises; is faithful to his word; is kind, gracious, and merciful, as well as mighty and powerful; and all this they shall experimentally know, and publicly own and acknowledge:

*when I shall bring you into the land of Israel;* which will be the Lord's doing; his hand and his power will be signally seen in it; this is one of the places in prophecy, which clearly asserts that the Jews, when converted, shall be brought into their own land again:

*into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand, to give it to your fathers;* that is, which he swore he would give unto them.

**Ver. 43.** *And there ye shall remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled, &c.*] Their rejection of the Messiah; their continued disbelief of him; their obstinacy, hardness, and impenitence; their adherence to the traditions of the elders, to the making void the word of God; together with the most flagrant immoralities that ever any people were guilty of, and which are of a very defiling nature, and made them abominable in the sight of God; these now the Spirit of God convincing them of, they will remember with shame and confusion, and mourn over them in an evangelical way; and the more so, when they shall find themselves reinstated in their own land, enjoying all civil and religious privileges and liberties under Christ their King, whom they will now know, own, and serve; (see <sup><3320></sup>Zechariah 12:10):

*and ye shall loath yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed;* against God and Christ; against the law of the one, and the Gospel of the other. Sin is a loathsome thing to God; and it is so to his people. When they are thoroughly convinced of it, and they loath themselves for it; and never more so than when they have the greatest instances and clearest discoveries of the love and grace of God in Christ to them; then they blush, are ashamed of themselves and their sins, and are confounded when they perceive the Lord is pacified towards them, and their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake: sin never appears more odious and loathsome than when viewed in the glass of pardoning love; (see <sup><4306></sup>Ezra 9:6,8 <sup><3366></sup>Ezekiel 16:63).

**Ver. 44.** *And ye shall know that I am the Lord, &c.]* Jehovah their righteousness, their Redeemer and Saviour, Lord and King; they shall know Christ, and him crucified, and God in Christ as their covenant God; (see Gill on “<sup>230D</sup>Ezekiel 20:42”); when I have wrought with you for my name’s sake; in the thorough conversion of them; not that there is any cooperation with God in that work; ministers indeed are coworkers, not as efficient, but instruments; persons converted are wholly passive in the first work of conversion or regeneration; and in all later actings move as they are acted, turn being turned, walk and run being drawn, not being able to do anything as of themselves: but the phrase signifies a working in favour of them; doing great things for them, and good things in them, well pleasing in his sight, and good unto them; plucking them as brands out of the burning; taking them out of the hands of Satan; calling them out of darkness into light, and bringing them out of bondage into liberty; and all this

*for his own name’s sake*, of his own will and pleasure, according to his abundant mercy, and for the glory of his rich grace:

*not according to your wicked ways, not according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God;* had he, they must have perished in their sins, and been miserable for ever; but he neither proceeds according to the bad works nor the good works of men, in calling and converting them, but according to his own purpose and grace, (<sup>230D</sup>2 Timothy 1:9), their evil works do not hinder his grace when he is resolved to work, and their good works do not merit it; he acts freely, and in a sovereign way.

**Ver. 45.** *Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.]* Or the word of prophecy, as the Targum. Here begins a new prophecy, and most properly a new chapter should here begin; for the next chapter is of the same argument with this, and an explanation of it, and an enlargement upon it. And here Ben Melech begins one; and so Junius and Tremellius, Piscator, and Castalio.

**Ver. 46.** *Son of man, set thy face toward the south, &c.]* The land of Judea, which lay south of Babylon, where the prophet now was, as Babylon lay north of that, (<sup>241H</sup>Jeremiah 1:14 4:6) to set his face was to speak freely and boldly, with courage and constancy, and without fear and dread, to the inhabitants of it; and as a token of the Lord’s face being set against them for their sins. The Targum is,



“take a prophecy towards the way of the south.”

*And drop thy word toward the south*; or prophecy, as the Targum; doctrine or prophecy being compared to rain, and the delivery of it to the dropping or distilling of rain; which falls gently, gradually, successively, and oftentimes with weight, and to good purpose; (see <sup>631D</sup>Deuteronomy 32:2), which metaphorical phrase is explained in the next clause:

*and prophesy against the forest of the south field*; the city of Jerusalem, in the land of Judea, which was very full of people, as a forest of trees; but these barren and unfruitful, as the trees of the wood generally are; and a rendezvous of wicked persons, comparable to beasts of prey, that haunt in woods and forests.

**Ver. 47.** *And say to the forest of the south, &c.*] To the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea:

*hear the word of the Lord*; attend to it, and receive it, believe it, and take warning from it:

*thus saith the Lord God, behold, I will kindle a fire in thee*; in Jerusalem; meaning that he would send great calamities among them, the sword of the Chaldean army, famine, and pestilence; and that at last it should be burnt with fire, and the remainder of the inhabitants be carried captive:

*and it shall devour every green tree, and every dry tree*; all sorts of persons should be consumed by one or other of the above calamities, high and low, rich and poor, good and bad; and if good men should suffer, comparable to green trees, which fire will not so easily burn, not being fit fuel for it; then much more bad men, who were by far the most numerous, comparable to dry trees, and so fit fuel for the flames, and easily consumed thereby:

*the flaming flame shall not be quenched* or, the “flame, flame”; or, “the flame of flame”<sup>f298</sup>; signifying either the succession of these calamities one after another; or the force and strength of them, which should not be abated until the ruin of the city was completed:

*and all faces from the south to the north shall be burnt therein*; which some understand of an utter destruction of the Jews, either by sword, famine, and pestilence, or by captivity from Jerusalem or Judea unto Babylon; but rather the meaning is, that all the inhabitants thereof should

suffer, from one end of it to the other, from Beersheba to Dan, the country lying in such a position.

**Ver. 48.** *And all flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it, &c.*] Not only the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea should see the hand of the Lord in their destruction; but even all the neighbouring nations, the case was so clear and plain, the matter so visible:

*it shall not be quenched;* no stop put to it by all the art and power of man; so that it was a clear point that it was the Lord's doing.

**Ver. 49.** *Then said I, ah Lord God!* &c.] The Septuagint version is, "by no means, Lord, Lord"; that is, let me not be sent on such an errand; at least, let it not be delivered in such figurative terms; or let not such a general calamity befall the people. The Targum is,

"receive my prayer, O Lord God;"

the prophet here either complains of the usage he had met with after delivering the above prophecy; or rather of what he had met with before, and which he expected again; and therefore desired either that he might be excused delivering the prophecy; or, however, that it might be delivered not in obscure and enigmatical terms, but in plain and easy ones:

*they say of me, doth he not speak parables?* as before, of a lion and her whelps; and of a vine, and its rods and branches, (<sup>2590E</sup>Ezekiel 19:1-14) and now here again, of a fire, and a forest, and trees of it, green and dry; things not easily understood, and so not attended to and regarded; as if they should say, this man brings us nothing but parables, riddles, and enigmas, and such sort of unintelligible stuff, not worth minding; and rather appears as a man delirious and mad than a prophet. Wherefore Ezekiel seems to desire that he might be sent to them with a message more plainly expressed; and which might excite their attention and regard, and not expose him to their ridicule and contempt; and accordingly we find it is explained and expressed in clearer terms in the next chapter.