

Ezekiel's Calling and Ministry

Ezekiel 1-3

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 111-127, 132, 137, 154-155, emphasis added; updated to modern American English.

Ezekiel 2:3. “And he said to me, Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me, even to this very day.”

Ezekiel's unpleasant calling

We must now see how God prepares Ezekiel for the discharge of his duties. *I send you*, He says, *to the children of Israel, a rebellious race*, that is, disobedient and revolting. In this manner the Prophet was able to escape as soon as he saw the odious duty assigned to him, for its difficulty alone would frighten him. But a double trial is added when he saw himself engaged in a contest with numberless enemies. He was challenged to engage in conflict with all the Israelites of his day, and this was a most grievous trial. But another trial was, not only that he perceived himself beating the air—to use a common proverb, but **he must have felt it a profanation of heavenly doctrine to address it to impious men, and that too only for the purpose of exasperating them still further.**

We see, then, that the Prophet had no inducement of earthly gratification to urge him to undertake his duty. If God wished to use his agency, he ought to afford him some hope of success, or, at least, he ought to leave it sufficiently uncertain to urge him to make every effort. But when in the first instance this difficulty occurs, that he has to deal **with a perverse and stubborn generation**—next, that he is drawn into a hateful contest—thirdly, that he is advised to cast what is holy before dogs, and pearls before swine, and thus, as it were, to prostitute the word of God, surely his mind must despair a hundred times when he pondered these things within himself.

Hence it was God's plan to arm him with unconquerable constancy, so that he might go forward in the course of his calling. We must bear in mind, then, this principle: when God wishes to stir us up to obedience, He does not always promise a happy result from our labor: **but sometimes He so puts our obedience to the test, that He wishes us to be content with His command, even if our labor should be deemed ridiculous before men.**

Sometimes, indeed, He indulges our infirmity, and when He orders us to undertake any duty, He at the same time bears witness that our labor shall not be in vain, and our industry without its recompense: then indeed God spares us. But He sometimes proves His people as I have said, providing that whatever be the result of their labors, it is sufficient for them to obey His command. And from this passage we readily collect that our Prophet was thus dispirited.

Isaiah's ministry of condemnation

We read the same of **Isaiah**; for when he is sent by God, he is not only told that he must speak to the deaf, but what God proposes to him is still harder. Go, says He, render the eyes of this people blind, and their ears dull, and their heart obstinate (Isaiah 6:9, 10). Not only **therefore does Isaiah see that he would be exposed to ridicule**, and so lose the fruit of his labor, but he sees that his address has but one tendency—namely, the blinding of the Jews: no, even their threefold destruction—though even one destruction is enough. But, as I have already said, God sometimes so wishes His servants to acquiesce in His government, that they should labor even without any hope of fruit. And this must be diligently marked. For as often as we are called on by God before we apply ourselves to our work, these thoughts come into the mind: “What will be the result of this?” and “What shall I obtain by my labor?” And, then, when the event does not turn out according to our wish, we despond in our minds. But this is wresting from God a part of His government. For although our labor should be in vain, yet it is sufficiently pleasing to God Himself; therefore let us learn to leave the event in the hand of God when He enjoins anything upon us; and although the whole world should deride us, and despair itself should render us inactive, yet let us be of good cheer and strive to the utmost, because it ought to suffice us that our obedience is pleasing to God.

For this reason Paul says (2 Corinthians 2:15, 16) **that the gospel, although it is a savor of death unto death, is yet a sweet savor unto God.** When it is said that the gospel brings death, our judgment might immediately suggest to us, that nothing is better than to leave it. Therefore Paul meets us, and says, we ought not to judge the gospel by its success. Although, therefore, men not only remain deaf, but even become worse, and rush headlong in fury against God, yet the gospel always retains its sweet savor before God. The doctrine of the Prophet is the same.

Now, if any one objects that God acts cruelly while He so purposely blinds men, that those who are already sufficiently lost perish twice or three times over, the answer is at hand—God offers His word indiscriminately to the good and bad, but it works by His Spirit in the elect, as I have already said; and as to the reprobate, the doctrine is useful, as it renders them without excuse.

Next, that their obstinacy may be broken down—for since they refuse to yield willingly to God, it is necessary that they should yield when conquered—when, therefore, God sees the reprobate thus broken down, He strikes them with the hammer of His word. At length He takes away all excuse of ignorance, because being convicted of their own conscience, whether they will or not, they become their own judges, and their mouth is stopped. Although they do not cease their rebellion against God, yet they are subject to His judgment. Although, therefore, this may seem absurd, that God should send His Prophets to render the people blind, yet we must reverently submit to His counsel, even if the cause is unknown to us for a time. But, as I have said, we do understand, to a certain extent, why God thus strives with rebellious and obstinate men.

Were there any elect Jews in Babylon? Yes, there was an elect remnant.

Is it then asked whether a single individual remained who would embrace the Prophet's doctrine? The answer is easy. The discourse does not relate to individuals, but to the whole people; for the Prophets often use similar language, as when *they* call the Israelites degenerate and spurious, then sons of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the

offspring of Canaan. They inveigh against the multitude promiscuously; for **they had in fact a few disciples** who could not be classed in that order (Isaiah 1:10; 8:16; 57:3; Ezekiel 16:3). But we must hold what is said by Isaiah 8—“ Bind my testimony upon my disciples.” There the Prophet is ordered from above to address **the faithful, of whom a small number remained**, and so to address them as if the letter were folded and sealed. But he spreads abroad this discourse among the whole people.

So also when God pronounces the sons of Israel to be *rebellious nations*, He looks to the body of the people; at the same time **there is no doubt that God always preserved a seed to serve Him, although hidden from man**. Daniel was then in exile with his colleagues, and he surely was not a rebel against God; but as I have already said, enough has been brought forward to show that the whole people were impious.

God says that He had previously tried what the people was—They *have rebelled*, He says, *against Me*; by which words He signifies that He was not making an experiment as if they were previously unknown. He says that He had already found out their perverseness by many trials; and yet He says that *He sends to them*, because He wished, as I have already said, to render their ignorance perfectly excuseless, and then He wished to break down their *contumacy*, which was otherwise untamable.

EZEKIEL 2:4-5

“4. For *they are* impudent children and stiff-hearted. I do send you to them; and you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord God. 5. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (for they *are* a rebellious house), yet shall they know that there has been a prophet among them.”

The result is, that the Prophet, while he applied himself to perform the commands of God, ought so to determine with himself, when he approaches the people, that his teaching would be not only useless as to them, because it would not be received with the reverence which it deserves, but would be even exposed to many reproaches: since the Israelites were not only filled with a hidden contempt of God, but they openly showed their ferocity, so to speak, since they were of so brazen a front that they would without doubt purposely reject the Prophet.

They are hard-hearted children, etc., yet I send you to them. Here, again, God opposes His own command, as the Prophet simply acquiesces in this word alone, “I have a divine mission.” If he displeases men, he is content to have his labor approved of God. This is the meaning of the phrase which is now a second time repeated, *I send you to them*. For the Prophet might object, What can I do? for if they are of a brazen heart and of an iron front, I shall labor in vain. But God answers in return, that the Prophet need not be anxious, it is enough to have a command: as if a prince should not explain the whole of his counsel to his ambassador, and yet should order him to discharge his embassy, thus God acts towards His servant. We see then how God here magnifies His authority. And we must mark this diligently, that we may not wish always to be bargaining with Him, as we are accustomed. For unless God show us the present fruit of our labor, we languish, and so we endeavor by turning back to withdraw ourselves from His authority. But God opposes this single sentence, *Behold I send you*. The rest I leave till tomorrow.

PRAYER

Grant, O Almighty God, since You have counted us worthy of enjoying the privilege of daily listening to Your word, that it may not find our hearts of stone and our minds of iron,

but may we so submit ourselves to You with all due docility, that we may truly perceive You to be our Father, and may be confirmed in the confidence of our adoption, as long as You persevere to address us, until at length we enjoy not merely Your voice, but also the aspect of Your glory in Your heavenly kingdom, which Your only begotten Son has acquired for us by His blood. — Amen.

We may learn then from this place, that **although the impious furiously endeavor to reject the doctrine of God, yet they obtain no other end than the more complete manifestation of their own wickedness.** Hence, also, we may learn that God's doctrine is precious to Himself, and that He cannot bear us to despise it. **The wicked then never can escape punishment when they treat with contempt the divine teaching,** for it is as if they trampled upon inestimable treasure, Those who are left without the law and the prophets shall not escape God's hand, because their conscience is sufficient to take away all excuse (Romans 2:12). But when God invites men to Himself, and approaches near them, and offers Himself to them in a peculiar manner as their Father and Teacher, if they reject so remarkable a benefit, truly their ingratitude is worthy of the utmost severity.

For as often as God raises up prophets for us and faithful ministers of His doctrine, let this which has just been said come into our minds: unless we embrace such a benefit, we at length shall know that a prophet has been among us, because God will exact fearful vengeance for the contempt of His great loving-kindness. Now it follows —

EZEKIEL 2:6

“And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns *be* with you, and you dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house.”

Here God again commands His servant to break forth boldly, even if the people deny Him all approach through their malice and wickedness. But because we often fail through terror, God arms His Prophet with impregnable confidence against the threats of the people, and then against all discourses of every sort. He brings forward no other reason *than they are a rebellious house*, or a rebellious and perverse nation. For we said, though at the first glance it might seem cold, yet it suffices to animate the servants of God to know that He commands nothing rashly, and when they acknowledge that **God is pleased by their spending their breath upon the deaf**, yet they do not cease to discharge their duty, **although they fatigue themselves in vain as far as the world is concerned.**

But now when this thought is added, that God will take care of His own servants, it doubles their confidence and good spirits. Thus it happens, that all threats and terrors being despised, they discharge their duty boldly. For this reason He now says, *you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, nor be terrified at their words.*

Religious hypocrisy

By *words*, I do not understand simply threats but calumnies by which we know the servants of God to be oppressed. For **hypocrites rise up with great confidence and complain of the injury done to them**, and then presumptuously take upon themselves the name of God, as at this time the Papists not only vomit out threats by which they disturb us, but haughtily boast themselves to be the Church, and confirm this by

perpetual succession; then they say that the Church never is without the Holy Spirit, and hence it cannot happen that God should ever desert them. We see, therefore, that the domestic enemies of God not only use threats against His servants, but at the same time bring many false pretenses by which they load the true and faithful Prophets with envy and hatred. But, however such calumnies have some appearance of truth when its enemies unjustly press us, God orders us to proceed with unconquered fortitude.

Be not afraid, therefore, He says, *of either them, or their words*. And since the same phrase is repeated shortly afterwards, hence we infer that it has no common meaning. It is therefore worthy of observation, that God once, yes twice, pronounces that **we ought not to fear their words who boast themselves to be the Church of God**, and doubt not petulantly to render that sacred name a laughing-stock by their use of it.

Since, therefore, God allows us to despise language of this kind, there is no reason why the Papists of this day should daunt us, when, with inflated cheeks, they thunder out the name of the Church and the Apostolic authority; for just honor is not attributed to God, unless every lofty thing in the world is compelled to obey Him, so that the doctrine alone may shine forth which comes direct from the mouth of God.

Now he adjoins, *because, (or although) . . . however rebellious they may be, and like thorns, however you may dwell among scorpions, yet do not fear their words, and do not be broken down [in spirit] by their appearance. . . .*

This passage teaches us that none are fit to undertake the prophetic office, except those who are armed with fortitude and perseverance whatever may happen, so that they do not fear any threats, nor hesitate or vacillate when oppressed by unjust calamities. So Paul says (2 Corinthians 6:8) that he persevered through both evil report and good report, although he was unworthily slandered by the wicked.

Whoever, therefore, wishes to prepare himself faithfully for undertaking the office of a teacher, should be endued with such constancy that he may oppose, as it were, an iron front to all calumnies and curses, threats and terrors.

We cannot doubt but that the Israelites were much enraged when they heard themselves called thorns and scorpions. But they ought to be thus stung, since if they had been attacking a mortal man only, they would conduct themselves far more petulantly [contemptuously]. But when God pronounces them *scorpions and thorns*, and they see the Prophet performing commands of this kind fearlessly and without hesitation, they are necessarily impelled to either fury or silence. But when they have striven to the very last in their obstinacy and hardness, yet God at length causes them to yield through shame, because truth has prevailed, of which the Prophet was a minister endued with such great fortitude of mind.

The prophets' "style" of preaching

We also perceive from this passage, that **the Prophets often spoke with great asperity [harshness] when the wickedness of those with whom they had to deal required it**: yet they were not hurried away into any excess, or carried forward with intemperance against their adversaries. But they could not in any other way vindicate their doctrine against the wicked, who, impelled by a diabolical fury, strove with even God Himself. We must hold, therefore, that **although they were cruel and severe in**

language, yet they breathed pure humanity from the heart. For our Prophet was not a barbarous man, who excited by indignation, vomited out coarse reproaches against his own people, but the Spirit of God dictated, as we see, what might seem too severe to soft and delicate ears.

EZEKIEL 2:7

“And you shall speak My words to them, whether they will hear, or whether will forbear; for they *are* most rebellious.”

Again He repeats what He had said, with but the change of a few words, yet the meaning is the same, that the Prophet should not desist in the midst of his course, if he saw that he did not obtain what he wished and hoped for. For when we apply ourselves to what God commands, we ought to be of good cheer, and expect that some fruit of our labor may appear. We may, therefore, indulge both hopes and wishes, but **if it should turn out otherwise than we anticipated, yet we ought to leave the result in the hands of God, and to proceed even to the goal in the discharge of our duty.** To this end this sentence tends: *you, says He, shall utter My words, or pronounce My words, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear:* that is, even if you sing a song to the deaf, according to the proverb, yet you shall not cease to utter My words: and He adds the reason, *because they are a rebellious house.*

God admonishes His servant beforehand, that there was no reason why he should turn back although he should see no fruit of his labors, because he ought to determine this in his mind, although they have no ears yet he must speak in God's name. It is certain, as we mentioned yesterday, that **there were some, though few in number, to whom his teaching was useful [i.e., the elect remnant], but he treats here of the people at large.** We must learn, therefore, when God calls us to the office of teaching, not to regard the conduct of mankind. For if it please God to exercise us while we strive with the rebellious and refractory, yet God's word must be uttered, because He commands it. It follows—

EZEKIEL 2:8

“But you, son of man, hear what I say to you; Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth, and eat what I give you.”

God continues to confirm His servant, but He advises him of a cause of stumbling which might break his spirit; for when he perceived the great obstinacy of the house of Israel, he might refuse the office of their teacher a hundred times over. God, however, adds incentives and exhortations to perseverance, although he experiences the abandoned obstinacy of the house of Israel: *hear, says He, what I shall say to you.*

Here we see that **no one can discharge the teacher's office, unless he be proficient in God's school.** It behooves, therefore, those who wish to be thought disciples of God to be teachers of truth, and for this purpose first to listen to God's instructions. Then He takes away a stumblingblock, as we have said, *do not be rebellious like the house of Israel.* For we know that a multitude has much influence over us to disturb us: for the consent of a whole people is like a violent tempest, where all conspire together, and even those who are not wicked yet are carried forward with the crowd. Since, therefore, the multitude sometimes carries away even the servants of God, here God meets His Prophet and puts a bridle on him, *that you be not rebellious, says He, like the house of Israel.* He does not here speak indefinitely concerning any people, but concerning that

nation which boasted itself to be divinely elected, and bore in the flesh the symbol of its adoption. Yet God wishes the consent of His people to be neglected by His Prophet, because we know how insolently the Israelites boasted themselves to be the sacred and peculiar people of God; in the same way indeed as the Papists now exult, Israel then vaunted against all the Prophets. And therefore this passage must be diligently observed, because at this day many of these magnificent titles vanish away when they are brought to reason: for we know that they are mere smoke by which Satan endeavors to blind our eyes, while he falsely brings forward the name of God and the Church.

We ought, indeed, to receive whatever is uttered by God with such modesty and veneration that we may be completely affected as soon as His name is mentioned, but meanwhile **we must use prudence and discretion**, lest we should be struck with awe when Satan uses God's name to deceive us.

And as **we must use discernment**, God here shows us the rule of doing so. For if we are thoroughly persuaded that, the doctrine which we follow and profess is from God, we can safely look down from on high not only upon all mortals but upon angels themselves: for there is no excellence so great but that God's truth outshines it.

Therefore when formerly the Israelites pretended that they were God's people, and were adorned by the marks of a true Church, we must hold that **the honor of the Church is frivolous when hypocrites reign in it, or rather exercise impious tyranny, and oppose themselves to God and His doctrine.**

The Papists

And at this very day we may turn this passage against the Papists—no, even point it at them directly as often as they bring up those pompous titles of “the Catholic Church,” and “the Spouse of Christ,” for God has said once for all, that we ought not to be rebellious, although the whole house of Israel should become so; that is, although those who bring forward the name of God should mutually enter into a diabolic conspiracy, yet we must not regard their conduct so as to subscribe to their impious conspiracy. We read the same in Isaiah (Isaiah 8:12, 13). You shall not say a conspiracy whenever this people says conspiracy; you shall not feel their fear nor their dread, but sanctify the Lord of hosts. Which passage Peter also cites (1 Peter 3:14, 15); because the Jews, who then pertinaciously opposed the gospel, weakened the feeble by their boasting, by saying that they were the Church, and yet rejected and abominated the new teaching which was then spread abroad. Peter cites that place of the Prophet, namely, although the house of Israel impiously conspired against God, yet such contumacy must be despised. Afterwards the Prophet adds (Isaiah 8:18), Behold! I and the children whom God has given me for a sign and a wonder. He says, therefore, that those little ones who worship God purely, and withdraw themselves from the common impiety, were like monsters, and were esteemed as complete wonders. But the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews accommodates this place to the reign of Christ (Hebrews 2:13), and not without reason.

For to this day we are a wonder to God's enemies, who carry themselves not only with boldness but with abandoned impudence against the pure doctrine of the gospel. To them we are heretics, schismatics, dogs—no, the offscouring of the world. But although we are to them for signs and wonders, it is sufficient for us to be acknowledged by God; because it is needful for us to be separated from that impious

conspiracy unless we wish to be separated from God Himself. For what agreement is there with Papists, or what union with those dregs, unless by separation from God Himself?

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

True versus false preaching

It follows: *open your mouth, and eat whatever I shall put before you*. By this practical symbol God confirms Ezekiel in his vocation: for He orders him *to eat a book*, which was fulfilled in vision. **Jeremiah uses the same metaphor** (Jeremiah 15:16) but with some slight difference, because our Prophet seemed to himself to eat a volume, but Jeremiah only signifies that he had digested the words of God like food, not that he only tasted them with his tongue, and that they were so thoroughly fixed in his mind as if he had really dressed and digested them. But God wished to confirm our Prophet in another way, namely, by offering him a volume, and commanding him to eat it.

There is no doubt that this volume comprehended whatever the Spirit of God afterwards dictated to the Prophet; and yet the effect was just as if God had made a mortal the channel of His Spirit: as if He had said, “Now you shall utter nothing human nor terrestrial; because you shall utter what my Spirit has already written in this book.”

But here we see a difference between the true servants of God, who discharge their duty in earnest, and talkative men, who are satisfied with their own powers of eloquence, or rather garrulity [excessive talkativeness; loquaciousness]: for there are many ready speakers who utter what they have never digested, and thus their teaching is but vapid. And this is the meaning of what Paul says: the kingdom of God is not in word but in power (1 Corinthians 4:20).

But those who truly consecrate themselves to God, not only learn what they speak of, but as food is eaten, so also they receive within them the word of God, and hide it in the inmost recesses of their heart, so that they may bring it forth from there as food properly dressed. Now, therefore, we understand why God wished the Prophet to eat the book, concerning which also it follows afterwards —

. . . if Ezekiel ought to bring forward nothing but what he had received from God, this rule ought to prevail among all God’s servants, that they should not heap up their own comments, but pronounce what God teaches them as if from His mouth. Likewise, that

passage of Peter ought to guide us, that he who speaks in the Church ought to speak the words of God (1 Peter 4:11).

Ezekiel 3:8-9

“Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant stone, harder than flint, have I made your forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house.”

We gather from this passage that although the whole world should rise up against the servants of God, yet His strength would be superior, as we saw it was with Jeremiah. They shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail (Jer. 1:19; 15:20). Hence there is no reason why we should be afraid of the violent attack of any enemy, and although the whole world should be in a tumult, yet we need not tremble, because God’s strength in us will always be more powerful. . . .

PRAYER

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

Ezekiel 3:18

“When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die; and you do not give him warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.”

Chastisements, threats, and terrors follow afterwards, of which now there is only the mention; but we must consider the condition of the people, as we have already seen it; for at that time the prevalence of impiety, and contempt of God, and of all kinds of wickedness, was so great, that the Prophet could not address the people mildly and softly.

Since, indeed, that passage of Paul must be remembered (1 Corinthians 4:21): What do you wish? How shall I come to you? with a rod, or in the spirit of mildness? Paul gives the Corinthians the choice, whether they wish him to come in a spirit of tenderness, or armed with a rod for their chastisement—and why? For when they were self-satisfied with their sins, Paul could not, according to his custom, treat them as sons, nor deal freely with them, but he was compelled to assume, as it were, another character, and to use pure austerity and rigor.

Such, then, were the Israelites, and hence we cannot feel surprise that God should lay aside His pity, His promises of favor, and whatever is sweet and pleasant to men; for they were not in a fit state to hear the paternal voice of God, unless previously subdued; and this could not be done without violence, because of their exceeding perverseness.

Ezekiel 3:27

“But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord God, He that hears, let him hear; and he that forbears, let him forbear; for they are a rebellious house.”

After a silence, God shows by what commands He wishes to instruct His servant, namely, by such as would exasperate the people, as we have formerly seen. Ezekiel's embassy therefore was hateful, since the Prophet begins with this insult — “If you wish to hear, hear; but if not, I am not concerned.”

Those who are sent as ambassadors are usually ordered to try whether they can conciliate, by courteous and friendly discourse, those with whom they have to deal. But God here follows a method completely the contrary. For what is the meaning of these words, *He who hears, let him hear. He who desists, let him desist?* namely, that the Israelites may understand that the Prophet was sent to them, not because there was any hope of their becoming wise again, since they had borne witness by experiments sufficiently numerous that they were altogether desperate. But the Lord sends the Prophet, that he may strike and wound them further, and at length inflict a deadly blow.

Now, therefore, we see that confirmed which the Prophet previously brought forward, that **the office of teaching was enjoined on him, not because his labor would be useful and fruitful with reference to the common people, but that he might inflame the Israelites to madness, if they were unwilling to grow wise again, that he might break them if they would not bend, and if they rejected him**, that he should accuse them before God, who would be their judge, and in the meanwhile the course of Prophetic teaching would be free, however pertinaciously they might resist it. Now we understand the intention of the Prophet.

Hence also we collect what I have lately touched upon: that God deals with the reprobate in various ways. Sometimes He makes it doubtful whether they be curable, and destines Prophets for them, who should exhort them to repentance. But when He sees them in their ingratitude burying all the light, then He deprives them of all doctrine; afterwards it shines forth again: at length other and denser darkness succeeds: therefore let us hasten, as long as the doctrine of salvation shines on us, lest God darken all our minds and senses, and deprive us of that singular benefit, when the image of His paternal favor is engraven on us, as we have said.

PRAYER

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