

A Land Worse than Sodom Ezekiel 16:44-55

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. II, 150-167, emphasis added; updated to modern American English.

A Degenerate People

Ezekiel 16:44-46

“Behold, everyone who quotes proverbs will use *this* proverb against you, saying, ‘Like mother, like daughter!’ You *are* your mother’s daughter, loathing her husband and her children; and you *are* the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children; your mother *was* a Hittite and your father an Amorite. And your elder sister *is* Samaria, who dwells with her daughters at your left hand; and your younger sister, who dwells at your right hand, *is* Sodom and her daughters.”

Here the Prophet uses another form of speech; for he says that the Jews deserved to be subject to the taunting proverbs of those who delight in wickedness. The sense is, that they were worthy of extreme infamy, so that their disgrace was bandied about in vulgar sayings. This is one point. He now adds that proverbs of this kind were the Jews’ desert—*the daughter is like her mother and sisters*. Then he says, *their mother was a Hittite and their sisters Samaria and Sodom*. We must briefly treat these clauses in order.

When the Prophet speaks of proverbs, he doubtless means what I have touched on, namely, that the crimes of the nation deserved that their infamy should fly abroad on the tongues of all; for there are many sins which are hidden, through either their being spared, or their not seeming to be much noticed. If any one surpass all others in cruelty, avarice, lust, and other vices, his disgrace will be notorious, and he will be pointed at by vulgar proverbs. Hence Ezekiel dwells on the people’s wickedness, since they supply material for all men to laugh at their expense; for he alludes to buffoons and wits, and such as are ingenious in fabricating vulgar sayings.

Virtues and vices

The maker of proverbs shall utter this proverb against you: like mother like daughter. There is no doubt that they used this saying at that period, and it often happens that daughters’ faults are like their mothers’. Daughters indeed often degenerate from the best mothers, and matrons [mothers] will be found who excel in the virtues of modesty, chastity, sobriety, and watchfulness, while their daughters are rash and proud, luxurious, lustful, and intemperate; but it usually happens that a mother has wicked daughters like herself. This happens less by nature than by education; for a woman of a perverse inclination will think that a stigma attaches to herself if her daughter is better than she is, and so she will wish to form her after her own morals; hence it happens that few daughters are found modest whose mothers are immodest, few sober who have been brought up by drunkards. Since therefore experience always taught the similarity between mothers and daughters, hence this proverb was in the mouth of every one. Proverbs, however, are not always true, but only on the whole; but God sometimes extends His pity so far that the daughter of a wicked woman is honorable and well

conducted. But this is very rare. Hence this proverbial saying cannot be rejected—*like mother like daughter*.

It now follows: *you are the daughter of your mother*, that is, altogether like her. And this phrase is equally common among us, “*You are your father’s son*,” namely, you are like him in your sins. Thus the Prophet means that the nation was like their mother, since it differed in nothing from the Canaanites and the Hittites. He adds also, *sister and their daughters*, as if he would collect the whole family. He says *that Samaria is their elder sister, and Sodom their younger*. I know not whether those who think that Samaria is called older than Jerusalem, through its revolting first from the worship of God, have sufficient grounds for their interpretation. For as we go on we shall see that Samaria is compared with Sodom, and since Sodom is the worst, it is very naturally compared with it. For Jerusalem will afterwards be placed in the highest rank, because it had surpassed them all in enormity.

Samaria therefore is one of the sisters, and so is Sodom. These towns are called daughters, for we know that Sodom was not the only one destroyed by fire from heaven, since there were five cities (Genesis 10:19; 19:25). We see, then, why those smaller cities near at hand were called daughters of Sodom, and as far as Samaria is concerned, it was the head of the kingdom of Israel. Hence all the cities of the ten tribes were called its daughters.

With relation to the father, the Prophet says here more than he had ventured before. He says, *their father was an Amorite*, as if the Jews had sprung from profane nations, and did not draw their origin from a holy parent; and the Prophet very often makes this objection, not that they were spurious or descended according to the flesh from the uncircumcised Gentiles, but because they were unworthy of their father Abraham, through being degenerate. In fine, God here signifies that the parents of the Jews were not only profane nations but utterly reprobate, and those whom God for very just reasons had ordered to be destroyed, since they had contaminated the earth with their crimes far too long. He says that the Jews were like a daughter sprung from most abandoned parents.

As to his saying, *that the mother as well as sisters had despised their husbands*, this may seem absurd. But we know that in proverbs, parables, examples, and comparisons, all things ought not to be exacted with the utmost nicety. When Christ’s coming is said to be stealthy (Matthew 24:43, 44), if any one here desires to be cunning and inquires how Christ is like a thief, that will be absurd. And also in this place when it is said, *your mother has abandoned her husband and her sons, and your sisters have done the same*. God simply means that both the mother and sisters of Jerusalem were impure and perfidious women; and cruel also, since they not only had violated the marriage pledge and had thus broken through all chastity, but were like ferocious beasts against their own sons (Luke 12:39, 40; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). He reproveth the crime which we yesterday exposed, that of the Jews burning their own sons. In brief, he means to compare the Jews with the Canaanites, the Samaritans, and the Sodomites, in both perfidy and cruelty. Hence they are first condemned for throwing away all modesty and conjugal fidelity, and next for forgetting all humanity. It now follows—

Ezekiel 16:47

“You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as *if that were a very little thing*, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways.”

Now the Prophet, not content with the simile which he had used, says that the Jews were far worse than either their mothers or sisters. Yet he is not inconsistent, for God wished by degrees to drag the wicked to trial. If at the very first word He had said that they were worse than the Sodomites, they would have been less attentive to this accusation. But when He proposed a thing incredible, namely, that they were the daughters of the nations of Canaan, and the sisters of Samaria and Sodom, and afterwards proceeded further, and pronounced that they surpassed both their mother and sisters, this, as I have said, would stir up their minds more vehemently. This difference then contains no inconsistency, but rather tends to magnify their crimes.

You, says He, have not walked according to their ways. He does not here exempt the Jews from participating in sins as if they were faultless through not imitating the Hittites, or Sodomites, or Israelites: but the word *walking* ought to be restricted to the sense of equality, as if he said, you are not equal. But it is a kind of correction when God says that the Jews were not equal to the Hittites or Sodomites, meaning that their impiety was more detestable, since they rushed forward to all kinds of wickedness with greater license. We now understand the Prophet's meaning when he says that; the Jews *had not walked in the ways* of either Sodom or Samaria or the nations of Canaan, since they had gone before them, and even with greater ardor of pursuit; for if they had simply imitated the three people of whom mention has been made, *they had walked in their ways*. But when they were so hurried on in their intemperance as to run before them, they did not walk in their ways only through leaving them behind.

And this comparison will sufficiently explain the Prophet's mind, that the Jews did not follow either the Sodomites, Israelites, or Canaanites, but through their base and headlong violence left them far behind. And he says, as if it were only a small matter, that is, as if it were of little importance to you to be like mother and sisters. But *you have been corrupt*, says he, *before them*. He now explains the case more clearly, since they had not walked in their ways through precipitating themselves with greater license, as we have already said. It follows —

Ezekiel 16:48

“As I live, says the Lord God, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters.”

Since what we have lately seen was difficult to be believed, hence God interposes an oath. Nor is it surprising that shame was so despised and cast far away by the Jews, since they were inured [hardened] to it; and we know how **they were swollen with pride**, for they always boasted in their adoption and gloried in the name of God.

Besides, we know that at this day, if any one accuses a wicked nation, yet it is not so detestable as Sodom, and if he uses this phrase, he inflames all against himself, and causes them to reject his language with indignation. For who will suffer either one city or nation to be compared with Sodom? As far as concerned the Jews, we have said that it was intolerable in them to be fastidious and proud. There was also another reason why they should be indignant at being pronounced worse than the Sodomites: since God had not chosen them as His peculiar treasure in vain and marked them with magnificent titles: you shall be a nation of priests unto Me, you shall be my inheritance, and besides, My son—My first-born Israel (Exodus 19:6 and Exodus 4:22).

We now see how necessary the interposition by oath was to sanction what the Prophet had said. God therefore here swears by Himself, because we call Him in as a witness

and judge when we swear. But He swears by Himself or by His life, because, as the Apostle teaches, He has no greater by whom to swear (Hebrews 6:13). Whatever it be, He here prostrates all foolish boasting, by which the Jews were puffed up when He swears by Himself, *that they were worse than Sodom and her daughters*. And here also He calls in like manner the smaller cities *daughters of Jerusalem*. This was very hard upon the Jews, when the Prophet says and often repeats, *your sister Sodom*. But He wounds their feelings far more bitterly, *that Sodom was just in preference to Jerusalem*. This was indeed intolerable, and yet we see that the Holy Spirit by no means indulges them here. Hence we must not regard what the reprobate are able to bear, but they must be treated according to their own disposition, and since they rise fiercely against God, so also are they to be subdued, and, according to the common proverb, “a hard wedge must be formed for a hard knot.” It now follows —

Ezekiel 16:49

“Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: she and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”

Here God begins to show the reason why He extenuated the wickedness of Sodom in comparison with that of His own people. For if He had spoken generally, without explaining the counsel of God, His language would have been incredible, and so would have been ineffectual. But now God shows that He did not pronounce rashly what we heard before, namely, that the Jews were worse than the Sodomites. How so? *for this was the iniquity of Sodom your sister*, says He, first *pride*, then *fullness of bread*, and luxury in which they were in the habit of indulging, and of drowning themselves in ease to enjoy a long peace; afterwards, *they did not seize the hand of the poor*. Now He adds—

EZEKIEL 16:50

“And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw good.”

We must diligently attend to this passage; for God does not here excuse the wickedness of Sodom; but, abominable as that people was, He says that the Jews were yet more abandoned. We know why God inflicted His vengeance in a terrible manner against the Sodomites and their neighbors, for that was a fearful example; and Jude says that it was a kind of mirror of the wrath of God which awaits all the impious (Jude 1:7); and Scripture often recalls us to that proof of God’s judgment. But we must see how Sodom rushed forward to that degree of licentiousness so as to be horrified by no enormity.

Pride goes before destruction.

God says that they began by pride, and **surely pride is the mother of all contempt of God and of all cruelty**. Let us learn, then, that we cannot be restrained by the fear of God, unless **moderation** and **humility** reign within us.

Pride, we know, has two horns, so to speak; one is, when men forget their own condition, and claim to themselves not only more than is right, but what God alone calls His own. This, then, is one horn of pride, when men, trusting in their dignity, excellence, plenty, and wealth, are intoxicated by false imaginations, so as to think themselves equal to God. Now, another horn of pride is, when they do not acknowledge their vices, and despise others in comparison with themselves, and please themselves in enormities, just

as if they were free from any future account. Since, therefore, pride is contained in these two clauses, when men arrogate too much to themselves, and thus are blind to their own vices, each of these is doubtless condemned in the Sodomites, since they first *raised themselves by a rash confidence*, and then **refused to subject themselves to God, and rebelled against Him as if they could shake off His yoke.**

Gluttony and drunkenness condemned

He afterwards adds *fullness of bread*. But the Prophet seems to condemn in the Sodomites what was not blamable in itself. For when God feeds us bountifully, fullness is not to be considered a crime; but he takes it here for **immoderate gluttony**; for those who have abundance are often **luxurious**, and nothing is more rare than **self-restraint** when materials for luxury are supplied to us. Hence *fullness of bread* is here taken for intemperance, since **the Sodomites were so addicted to gluttony and drunkenness, that they gratified their appetites worse than the brutes**, who do retain some moderation, for they are content with their own food. But men's covetousness is altogether insatiable. Let us observe, then, that by *fullness of bread* we are to understand that intemperance in which profane men indulge when God supplies them bountifully with the means of living; for they do not consider why they abound in wine, and corn, and abundance of all things, but they drown themselves in luxuries with a blind and brutal impulse. Hence such greediness, so inflaming to the spirits of the Sodomites, is added to pride, that they arrogate to themselves more than is just.

Idleness, sloth, and pleasure-seeking condemned

He afterwards adds, *and rest* or ease. . . , and this seems without blame: for why shall we not be permitted to enjoy ease, if no one bothers or troubles us? Moreover, it is reckoned among God's blessings: you shall sleep, and no one shall frighten you (Leviticus 26:6). Since God, therefore, wishes this to be considered among His blessings, that the faithful should sleep soundly, without any anxiety or trouble, why is Sodom condemned for thus enjoying ease and peace?

But here its excess is pointed out, not its true use, since the use of peace is to render our minds tranquil, that we may return thanks to God and dwell calmly under His sway. But how do the reprobate act? They grow brutish, so to speak, in their own peacefulness. Hence **sloth** is in this passage meant by the peacefulness of ease, and God means that the Sodomites were intoxicated by their luxuries when they enjoyed peace. We must put off the remainder.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, since You have condescended to graft us once into the body of Your only-begotten Son, that we may be mindful of our origin, since from our very birth we were lost and cursed; and grant that we may be mindful of that grace by which You have honored us, so that we may worship You as a father, and preserve our trust in You inviolate. And may we be so obedient to You that Your image may be renewed in us more and more in all righteousness and holiness, until Your glory may perfectly shine forth in us in Your heavenly kingdom by the same Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.

LECTURE FORTY-EIGHT

We began in the last lecture to treat that passage where God pronounces that **the Jews surpassed in all kinds of wickedness both the Sodomites and the ten tribes of Israel**. When He wished to prove this He said that the iniquity of Sodom was *pride, fullness of bread*, and then *ease, with sloth and cruelty*. Afterwards He put another kind of pride, since the people were intoxicated with confidence, and indulged in unbridled and brutal license, as He afterwards says. For He adds, that the cities were overthrown and destroyed since they had perpetrated foul abominations.

With regard to excess, we said that good living simply is not here condemned when any one uses the affluence granted to him for God's glory; but luxury and intemperance [lack of moderation] are condemned. For the rich boast as much as possible, and are not only eager for delicacies, and stuff themselves to the full, but they triumph and luxuriate in what is sure to destroy them. The Prophet then blames this in the Sodomites.

We said also of quiet and rest, that it denoted that sloth by which the profane madden themselves; but that is more clearly expressed shortly by vain-boasting. The Prophet now adds, *that they had not seized the hand of the poor and needy*. We must notice this, since **pride is almost always cruel; and truly no one heartily succors his poor brethren who is not affected by their necessities**. But those who are intoxicated by false confidence, and claim everything for themselves, despise their brethren, and thus carelessly permit them to be utterly oppressed by poverty and want.

The Prophet here pronounces nothing concerning Sodom but what we too often perceive by daily experience. He now adds —

Ezekiel 16:50

“And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw good.”

Here God shows that Sodom had not at first fallen into those foul and gross crimes which were the cause of its final destruction. We must diligently mark this: for when Satan begins to entice us, we think that we shall be free to retract our steps whenever we please; but we are ensnared, some in one way and some in another. But when we are entangled by Satan's deceits, it is not in our power to escape from them; no, quite to the contrary, we feel that we are involved in a complete labyrinth.

Since, then, men proceed gradually in provoking God's wrath, we must observe this passage, in which God informs us that **the Sodomites were not given up at once to enormous lust, but they began with smaller sins, and then became luxurious through their abundance, and were stupefied by ease and quiet; meanwhile they despised the poor and needy, and did not stretch forth their hands to them**. For to *seize the hand* means the same as to stretch forth the hand, when we set up again those who have fallen, or prop up those who are slipping. Hence God shows that the Sodomites were afterwards so corrupted by luxuries, that He at length adds, *that they raised themselves up*, that is, that they purposely, and of their own accord, exempted themselves from all fear of punishment. For this is the meaning of the word raised up; that is, they buoyed themselves up, since they promised themselves freedom from punishment; and in that fallacious hope *they dared to perpetrate abomination before My face*.

Hence we must always fear lest Satan should entangle us by His enticements, and at length so fascinate and stupefy our senses that we can no longer distinguish between good and evil, as the Sodomites exceeded the brutes in their abominations, which were the cause of their ruin.

When God announces *that He removed those cities as He pleased*, He wishes to inspire the Jews with terror, lest they should suppose that they would profit by turning their backs; because, whether they wished it or not, He would at length drag them before His tribunal. God, therefore, here passes the final sentence, that the Jews may feel that they must render an account to Him.

Now, if any one should ask whether these crimes which Ezekiel relates are worse than those of the Jews, the answer is at hand, that **the Sodomites were not under the law**; and hence it is no wonder if they wandered and stumbled in darkness. But when the right course of life was pointed out to **the Jews**, they **professedly sought their own destruction, they knowingly and willfully rejected God's yoke, and haughtily despised all the prophets who daily desired to recall them into the path of duty.**

Other circumstances are also to be noticed, that the Jews not only abused the goods which God plentifully bestowed upon them, but, as we have seen, squandered them upon adulterous worship, and then they fetched from there all kinds of superstition, and became worse than the beasts, as we have seen elsewhere. We know also that the imitation of the people of Sodom was very common in Judea, when they were tainted with many corruptions through forgetfulness of the law. If, therefore, we weigh these points together, it will not be surprising that God pronounces the Jews to have sinned more grievously than the Sodomites. It now follows —

Ezekiel 16:51

“Neither has Samaria committed half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations which you have done.”

God now pronounces the same thing concerning **Samaria**, whom He had formerly called the younger sister. **By Samaria, as we said, He means the Israelites**, because that city was the head of the Kingdom of Israel. The ten tribes had been already driven into exile [in 722-721 B.C.]; and He says they were not half so wicked when compared with the Jews. This, at the first glance, may seem absurd; for we know that God's worship was continued at Jerusalem when the Israelites [in the North] rejected the law and basely and openly turned aside to idolatry. Since, therefore, some sound piety flourished at Jerusalem when the Israelites wickedly revolted from God's law, what can it mean by the Jews being censured as worse than they were?

We must always come to the fountain which I have pointed out; for ingratitude has great influence in exaggerating men's crimes. But another reason must also be remarked. The Jews had seen how severely God had avenged the superstitions of the kingdom of Israel. They were so far from repenting that they rather courted their alliance, as if for the very purpose of provoking God afresh. If we reflect on these two points, the question will be solved as far as relates to the present passage. God says what is incredible to us, that the Jews were worse than the Israelites. But He asserts this because ingratitude had rendered them less excusable; for God had retained them under His own charge when that wretched dispersion happened, and the ten tribes were all but absorbed. God's candle was always shining at Jerusalem, as it is said (Exodus 27:20). When,

therefore, God had preserved for Himself that small band as the very flower of the people, safe and sound, the revolt of this people was far more criminal than that of the ten tribes. For these tribes were drawn away from the worship of God little by little, as is well known. For Jeroboam always set before himself one definite object—the worship of God as the liberator of the people (1 Kings 12). For the Israelites did not look on themselves as apostates, although they had degenerated from their fathers.

But the Jews addicted themselves to gross superstitions, of which the Israelites at first were ashamed; and then they were warned by many penalties not to imitate their kinsmen [relatives]. Still, as we saw before, the temple was defiled by many pollutions; for Ezekiel, in the eighth chapter, says that he saw there many defilements. Since then the Jews profited so badly, though God set His vengeance before their eyes, it is not surprising that they are said to have sinned grievously.

In conclusion, he adds, *you have multiplied your abominations beyond them; and you have justified your sisters in all the abominations which you have perpetrated*. Here the word *justified* is to be received at first comparatively. It does not signify that the fault of others is extenuated by the wickedness of the Jews; but if the people wished to offer excuses, they might easily be convinced that both Sodom and the kingdom of Israel were just in comparison with the Jews. To justify is usually received for “to absolve”; and we must observe this when we treat of justification, since the papists always seize upon the quality, as if to be justified was in reality to be just. Hence they are unable to comprehend a doctrine sufficiently familiar to Scripture, and plain enough—that we are justified by faith. For the papists examine man, that they may find justice there, and do not ascend any higher. But to be justified by faith signifies nothing but to be absolved [declared righteous], though we are not just in ourselves; hence a justification by faith without us [i.e., outside of us] must be sought for, and hence we gather that it is not a quality. Hence *Jerusalem justified her sisters*, although Sodom and Samaria were found worse than herself. It follows —

Ezekiel 16:52

“You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also, for your sins that you have committed were more abominable than theirs; they are more righteous than you. Yes, be disgraced also and bear your own shame, because you have justified your sisters.”

Here at length God announces that He would punish the Jews according to their deserts. Up to this point, He has recounted their crimes, as judges are accustomed when they condemn criminals to state the reasons which induce them to pass sentence. Thus God shortly shows how wicked the Jews were. He now adds, that He would avenge them according to the magnitude of their crimes. For they would easily have swallowed all reproaches if the fear of punishment had not been infused into them.

This second heading, then, was necessary, lest they should get off with impunity, since they had surpassed both Sodom and Samaria. *Be disgraced also and bear your own shame, because you have justified your sisters*. Here Ezekiel seems to be at variance with himself, for he said just now and will repeat again shortly, that Jerusalem had justified her sisters; and this is contrary to judging. But he says that Samaria was condemned by the Jews; and the solution of this discrepancy is easy. For the Jews justified both the Israelites and the Sodomites, not by absolving them in any sentence passed on them, but because they were worthy of double condemnation; as Christ says, In the last day it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the Jews (Matthew 11:24).

But what is here said of condemnation has another meaning—that the Jews insulted over their brethren when they saw their kingdom destroyed and the Israelites driven away from their land. Since they spoke so proudly of the slaughter of the ten tribes, as if innocent themselves, the Prophet here reproves them as if they judged them.

And this is too common with all hypocrites, to inveigh hardly against all others, and to grow hot against them, as if in this way they covered their own crimes. Paul reproves this vice in them, since they were supercilious [prideful] censors of others, and at the same time committed every sin. Do you think, O man, says he, when you judge others, that God will not condemn you; for who are you, O mortal man? Do you claim the office of a judge (Romans 2:1-3)? Meanwhile will God be deprived of His rights, so as not to call you to account for your sins? Now, therefore, we understand the Prophet's intention. For he exaggerates the crimes of the Jews when he pronounces sentence from on high against the ten tribes.

Truly God blotted out this kingdom [i.e., the northern kingdom of Israel] deservedly. For they were apostates; they had revolted from the family of David and had violated that sacred unity by which God had bound to Himself the whole family of Abraham. They had indeed just cause for speaking thus in condemning the Israelites; but when they were worse than them, what arrogance it was to harass their brethren and to be blind to their own vices, no, to grow utterly callous to them! *You, therefore, have judged your sister*, that is, you have taken God's office upon yourself, and yet you were worse than your sister. . . . There is no doubt that the Prophet here rebukes the pride with which the Jews were puffed up, while they judged others severely and themselves leniently.

They were justified in comparison with you, he says. *You, therefore*, he repeats, *blush and bear your disgrace*. This repetition is not superfluous, although in the former words there was nothing obscure, for it was difficult to persuade the Jews that they should suffer punishment, since God had borne with them so long. God's goodness, then, which invited them to repentance had rather hardened them and had occasioned so much torpor that they thought themselves free from all danger. Hence this is the reason why the Prophet confirms his former teaching concerning the nearness of God's vengeance against them.

He says, *when you have justified them*. He here repeats the cause, and does so to restrain all pretenses by which the Jews could in any way protect themselves. For by one word he shows that they must perish, since they had justified those who had been treated so strictly. For it is by no means likely, that God should cease from His office of judge in one direction, since He had been so severe against the Sodomites, who were in some way excusable for their errors. This then is the reason why the Prophet affirms again *that Sodom and Samaria were justified by the Jews*. It follows —

Ezekiel 16:53

“When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity in the midst of them.”

He here confirms again what we lately saw, that the Jews were doomed and devoted to final destruction, nor was it possible for them to escape any more than for Sodom to rise again and Samaria to be restored to her original dignity. . . . There is no doubt that the Prophet here deprives the Jews of all hope of safety by reasoning upon an impossibility:

as if he had said, you shall be safe when Sodom and Samaria are. We now understand the Prophet's meaning.

But the inquiry arises—how can he pronounce none of the Israelites safe, when their return home is so often promised? But we must bear in mind, what we saw elsewhere, and what it is often necessary to repeat, since many passages in the prophets would otherwise give rise to scruples. Therefore we have sometimes said, that the prophets speak of the people in two ways; for they sometimes regard the whole body of the nation promiscuously. But the Israelites were already alienated from God; afterwards the Jews also cut themselves off from Him. Since therefore each people, considering them in a body and in the mass, to speak roughly, was outcast, it is not surprising if the prophets use this language—that no hope of mercy remained—since they had excluded themselves from God's mercy.

But afterwards they change their discourse to **the remnant: for God always preserves a hidden seed, that the Church should not be utterly extinguished.** For there must always be a Church in the world, but sometimes it is preserved miserably as it were in a sepulcher [grave], since it is nowhere apparent. God, therefore, when He denounces final vengeance on the Jews, regards the body of the people, but then He promises that there shall be a small seed which He wishes to remain safe. Hence it is said in Isaiah (Isaiah 8:16), seal My law, bind up My testimony among My disciples; that is, address My disciples as if you were reading in a hidden corner any writing which you did not wish to be made public. Therefore, collect my disciples together, that you may deliver to them My law and My testimony like a sealed letter.

But now God cites to His tribunal those degenerate Jews who had nothing in common with Abraham, since they had made void and utterly abolished his covenant. Now, therefore, we see how the Jews perished together with Sodom and Samaria, and were never restored, that is, as far as relates to that filth and dregs which were utterly unworthy of the honor of which they boasted. *I will restore, therefore, their captivities; namely, the captivity of Sodom and of its cities, and the captivity of Samaria and its cities, and the captivity of your captivities,* that is, and the captivity of all your land; I will restore you, says he, altogether; but he speaks ironically, and, as I have said, he shows that God's taking pity on the Jews was impossible. It follows —

Ezekiel 16:54

“that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you have done, in that you are a comfort to them.”

Hence we gather from the last verse, that God gave the Jews no hope of safety, but rather confirms their utter destruction, so that no future safety was to be hoped for. For He says, *that you may bear your reproach and become ashamed,* namely, because they had sinned grievously, as I have said before, and had not repented of their wickedness. He adds, *in consoling them.* He speaks after the ordinary manner of men, since the miserable feel some consolation in seeing themselves perish among a great multitude. This then is the consolation of which the Prophet speaks, not that the sorrow of Sodom and Samaria was mitigated when they saw the Jews joined to themselves, but, as I have said, God adopts the common language of men. It follows —

Ezekiel 16:55

“When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, then you and your daughters shall return to your former state.”

A clearer explanation of the former doctrine now follows, that the Jews should thus feel God merciful when His mercy reached Samaria and Sodom; but that never could be done, and hence the Jews were reduced to despair; for, as I have said, the Prophet argues from what is impossible and almost absurd. Just as Virgil writes —

*“The inhabitants of seas and skies shall change [switch places],
And fish [walking] on shore, and stags [male deer] in air shall range:”*
Virgil, Dryden’s, *Eclogue 1. V. 60* —

which can never take place: so that it implies the complete denial of what might seem doubtful. This way of speaking is proverbial, when Ezekiel says that *the Sodomites and Israelites should return to their ancient state* or their former dignity; and that could never be hoped for, as I have said. Hence it follows, that the Jews could not be safe when God draws them into the same punishment. Besides, the Prophet speaks as if the city should be cut off and temple overthrown, since the Jews had often been threatened with this, and he had shown them the wrath of God present before their eyes. But, although they had always hoped well, yet he despises their pride by which they were blinded, and utters his prophecies openly as if God had executed whatever he had threatened.

For this reason he says, *the captivity of your captivities shall be in the midst of them*. But they might object, that they enjoyed their country, that they still cultivated their fields, and had sufficient food for their support although besieged by their enemies. But the Prophet looked down upon it all, because before God the city was as it were taken and all were exiles, since God had not threatened them in vain. . . .

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, since in Your inestimable mercy You have condescended to separate us from the profane nations, and to adopt us into Your family, that we may so conduct ourselves that You may not treat us as strangers. But while You acknowledge us as Your sons, may Your Spirit govern us until the end, so that Your name may be glorified in us, and at length we may be made partakers of that glory which has been acquired for us through Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.