

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

Thomas Guthrie, D.D.

Copyright © 1862

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEFILER

Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way, and by their doings (Ezekiel 36:11).

“Thy holy cities are a wilderness; Zion is a wilderness; Jerusalem is a desolation.” So low as this had the fortunes of Israel ebbed, when the words of my text were penned. Judah was in chains; the people were captives in the hands of heathen—exiles in the land of Babylon.

Jerusalem lay in ruins; the grass grew long and rank in her deserted streets; an awful silence filled the temple; the fox looked out of the window, and the foul satyr had her den in the Holy of Holies. No plough turned a furrow in the field; the vines grew wild and tangled on the crumbling terraces; nor cock crew, nor dog bayed, nor flock bleated, nor maid sang, nor shepherd piped, nor smoke curled up from homestead among the lonely hills.

The land was desolate, almost utterly desolate. She now enjoyed what the love of pleasure and the greed of gain had denied her; she rested, and had a long Sabbath; while over an expatriated people, far away beyond the desert, and beside the river, the Seventy years' captivity rolled wearily on. A few pious men, who had in vain tried to stem the floodtide of sin which swept the nation on to ruin, were mourning over the guilt of which captivity was the punishment. Wearing to be home again they cried, **“How long, O Lord, how long? Wilt thou be angry for ever? Shall thy jealousy bum like fire?”**

“Be not wroth very sore, Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever. Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people; thy holy cities are a wilderness; Zion is a wilderness; Jerusalem a desolation.”

“Turn us again, Lord God of Hosts, and cause thy face to shine on us, and so we shall be saved.”

So they felt and prayed who were as salt in the putrid mass. The larger portion, however, as has too often been the case in the visible church, lived only to dishonor their faith, their creed, their country and their race.

Like many still who go abroad, and in leaving their native land leave behind them all appearance of piety, they profaned God's holy name, and gave the scoffer abundant occasion for this bitter and biting sneer— **“These are the people of the Lord!”**

In its application to the contemporaries of Ezekiel, the prophet briefly describes those sad and sinful days, and also refers to that preceding period of deep and wide degeneracy, when the corruption of kings, princes, priests and people, had grown so great, that, to use the words of Scripture, Their **“trespass was grown up to the heavens.”**

The patience of God at length exhausted, as he “drove” the man and woman from the garden, he drove Israel from a land which their sins had defiled.

However much we may abhor their crimes, it is impossible not to pity the sufferers— in a sense to sympathize with them. Are we men who, in the ease of an invasion, would take a bold position on the shore, and fight every inch of ground, and when driven back would take our last stand in our own doorway, nor allow the foot of foe to pass there but over our dead body? If our bosom burns with any patriotic fire, if we have the common affections of men for family and friends, it is impossible to look with insensibility at that bleeding fragment of a nation gathered for the march to Babylon, amid the blackened and blood-stained ruins of their capital.

What a mournful company! The sick, the bedrid, the blind, old men tottering forth on the staff of age, and plucking their gray beards with grief; the skeleton infant hanging on a breast that famine and sorrow have dried; mothers with terror-stricken children clinging to their sides, or, worse still, with gentle daughters imploring their protection from these rude and ruffian soldiers; a few gallant men, the survivors of the fight, wasted by famine, bleeding from unbandaged wounds, their arms bound, and burning tears streaming down their cheeks, as they looked on wives and daughters shrieking and helpless in the arms of brutal passion; how they strain at their bonds! and bitterly envy their more fortunate companions who lay in the bloody breach, nor had survived to see the horrors of that day!

The piety that abhors the sins of this people is not incompatible with the pity that sympathizes with their sorrows; and could sit down and weep with Jeremiah, as, seated on a broken pillar of the temple, desolation around him, and no sound in his ear but the long, wild wail of the captive band, he wrung his hands, raised them to heaven, and cried, **“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.”**

There was a home-leaving, however, in which we feel a nearer interest. I do not refer to that eventful morning when some of us left a father's house; and the gates of that happy sanctuary opened, amid tears and fears and many a kind farewell—and when watched by a father's eye, and followed by a mother's prayers, we pushed out our bark on the swell of life's treacherous sea. The turning time of many a young man's history—the crisis of his destiny—that day may have exerted an influence as permanent on our fate as its impression remains indelible on our memory. I refer to a home-leaving of far older date; to one, not of personal, nor of national, but of universal interest.

My eye is turned back on the day when our first parents, who had fallen into sin and forfeited their inheritance, were expelled from man's first home. And, recollecting the reluctance with which I have seen a heart-broken mother make up her mind to disown the prodigal, and drive him from her door—knowing, when with slow and trembling hand she had barred him out, how it seemed to her as if in that horrid sound she had heard the door of heaven bolted against him—and feeling how much provocation we ourselves could suffer, ere a bleeding heart would consent to turn a child out upon the open streets.

Believing also that our Father in heaven is kinder than the kindest, and better than the best of us, and that the fondest, fullest heart is to his, but as the rocky pool—the lodge of some tiny creature—to the great ocean which has filled it with a wave; no demonstration of God's abhorrence of sin (always excepting the cross of Calvary) comes so impressively to our hearts as his expulsion of our unhappy parents from his own blissful presence and their sweet home in Eden.

When with slow and lingering steps Adam and Eve came weeping forth from Paradise, and the gate was locked behind them, that was the bitterest home-leaving the world ever saw. Adam, the federal head of his family—they came not alone, but are followed by a longer and sadder procession than went weeping on the way to Babylon: they are followed by a world in tears.

Cast out in them—in them condemned and expatriated—we all defiled the land wherein we dwelt. In this sense the world sinned in Adam, and defiled the happy bowers of Eden; and the universality of sin stands firm on the universality of the sentence, "**Death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.**"

I. *Let us look at man sinning. "Ye have defiled the land."*

Sin is presented here in the aspect of a defilement. But before fixing your attention on this feature, I may remark, that it offers but one of many aspects in which sin appears; all alarming, all hateful, all detestable.

As opposed to sin and its consequences, heaven and holiness are pictured forth in the Bible in colors that glow upon the canvas, through the emblems of everything we hold most dear and desirable. Raise your eyes, for example, to the New Jerusalem, Gold paves its streets, and around them rise walls of jasper. Earth holds no such city, nor the depths of ocean such pearls as form its gates; no storms sweep its sea: no winter strips its trees; no thunder shakes its serene and cloudless sky; the day there never darkens into night; harps and palms are in the hands, while crowns of glory flash and blaze upon the heads of its sinless inhabitants. From this distant and stormy orb, as the dove eyed the ark, faith eyes this glorious vision, and, weary of the strife, longing to be gone, ones, "**Oh that I had the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest!**"

And how difficult would it be to name a noble figure, a sweet simile, a tender or attractive relationship, in which Jesus is not set forth to woo a reluctant sinner and cheer a desponding saint!

- Am I wounded? He is balm.
- Am I sick? He is medicine.
- Am I naked? He is clothing.
- Am I poor? He is wealth.
- Am I hungry? He is bread.
- Am I thirsty? He is water.
- Am I in debt? He is a surety.
- Am I in darkness? He is a sun.
- Have I a house to build? He is a rock.
- Must I face that black and gathering storm? He is an anchor sure and steadfast.
- Am I to be tried? He is an advocate.
- Is sentence passed, and am I condemned? He is pardon.

To deck him out, and set him forth, Nature culls her finest flowers, brings her choicest ornaments, and lays these treasures at his feet. The skies contribute their stars. The sea gives up its pearls. From fields, and mines, and mountains, Earth brings the tribute of her gold, and gems, and myrrh, and frankincense; the lily of the valley, the clustered vine, and the fragrant rose of Sharon. He is “**the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely;**” “**in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.**”

I offer him to you—make a free offer of him, and doing so will challenge you to name a want for which I shall not find a supply in Christ, something that fits your want as accurately, as the works of a key the wards of its lock.

“ A Way he is to lost ones that have strayed;
 A Robe he is to such as naked be;
 Is any hungry, to all such he is Bread;
 Is any weak, in Him how strong is he!
 To him that’s dead he’s Life; to sick men, Health;
 Eyes to the blind, and to the poor man. Wealth.”

Look now at sin; pluck off that painted mask, and turn upon her face the lamp of the Bible. We start; it reveals a death’s head. I stay not to quote texts descriptive of sin; it is a debt, a burden, a thief, a sickness, a leprosy, a plague, a poison, a serpent, a sting—everything that man hates it is; a load of evils beneath whose most crushing, intolerable pressure, “**the whole creation groaneth,**”

Name me the evil that springs not from this root—the crime that lies not at this door.

- Who is the hoary sexton that digs man a grave?—Sin.
- Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue?—Sin.
- Who is the murderess that destroys his life?—Sin.
- Who is the sorcerer that first deceives and then damns his soul?—Sin.
- Who, with icy breath, blights the sweet blossoms of youth?—Sin.
- Who breaks the hearts of parents?—Sin.
- Who brings gray hairs with sorrow to the grave?—Sin.

- Who, by a more hideous metamorphosis than Ovid ever fancied, changes sweet children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters, and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocents?—Sin.
- Who casts the apple of discord on home hearths?—Sin.
- Who lights the torch of war, and carries it over happy lands?—Sin.
- Who, by divisions in the Church, rends Christ’s seamless robe?—Sin.
- Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep, and delivers the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised?—Sin.
- Who, with smiles on her face, and honeyed flattery on her tongue, stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality, and when suspicion sleeps, pierces our temples with a nail?—Sin.
- What Siren is this, who, seated on a rock by the deadly pool, smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arms around our neck, to leap with us into perdition?—Sin.
- Who petrifies the soft and gentle heart, hurls reason from her throne, and impels sinners, mad as Gadarene swine, down the precipice, into the lake of fire?—Sin.
- Who, having brought the criminal to the gallows, persuades him to refuse a pardon, and with his own hand to bar the door against the messenger of mercy?—Sin.
- What witch of hell is it, that thus bewitches us?— Sin.
- Who nailed the Son of God to that bloody tree? and who, as if it were not a dove descending with the olive, but a vulture swooping down to devour the dying, vexes, grieves, thwarts, repels, drives off the Spirit of God?—Sin.
- Who is it that makes man in his heart and habits baser than a beast; and him, who was once but little lower than an angel, but little better than a devil?—Sin.

Sin! Thou art a hateful and horrible thing; that “**abominable thing which God hates.**” And what wonder?

- Thou hast insulted his Holy Majesty?
- Thou hast bereaved him of beloved children;
- Thou hast crucified the Son of his infinite love;
- Thou hast vexed his gracious Spirit;
- Thou hast defied his power;
- Thou hast despised his grace;
- In the body and blood of Jesus, as if that were a common thing, thou hast trodden under foot his matchless mercy.

Surely, brethren, the wonder of wonders is, that sin is not that abominable thing which we also hate.

But let us leave what is general, to fix our attention on the view of sin which the text presents.

It is set before us here as a defilement; and I may remark, that it is the only thing that in the eye of God does deform and defile us. Yet how strange it is, that some deformity of body shall prove the subject of more parental regrets and personal mortification than this foul deformity of soul. It is miserable to think how hearts have grieved, and even eyes, which got their tears surely for better uses, have wept over the stain of some costly dress, which never grieved and never wept for a sin-stained soul.

What pains are taken, what costs and cares incurred, to bedeck the body for the house of God, as if that flimsy finery could conceal or compensate for a foul heart within!

Your manners may have acquired a courtly polish; your dress may rival the winter's snow; unaccustomed to menial offices, and sparkling with Indian gems, your hands may bear no stain on them, yet they are not clean; nay, beneath this graceful exterior may lie concealed more foul pollution than is covered by a beggar's rags. This son of toil, from whose very touch your delicacy shrinks, and who, till Sabbath stops the wheels of business, and with her kind hand wipes the sweat of labor from his brow, never knows the full comfort of a cleanly habit, may have a heart within, which, compared with yours, is purity itself.

Beneath this soiled raiment, all unseen by the world's eye, he wears the "clean linen" of a Redeemer's righteousness. His speech may be rude, his accent vulgar; but let him open his heart, unbosom its secrets, and from these there come forth such gracious thoughts, such holy desires, such heavenly aspirations, such hallowed joys, that it seems as if we had opened some rude sea-chest, brought by a foreign ship from southern lands, which, full to the lid with pearls, and gold, and diamonds, loads the air with floating odors of cassia, and myrrh, and frankincense.

Hypocrite, and dead professor! let us open thy bosom: full of all corruption, how it smells like a charnel-house! We are driven back by the noisome stench—we hasten to close the door; it is a painted but putrid sepulcher, whose fair exterior but aggravates the foulness within. It is not what lies without, but within, that defiles a man. And it is well all should remember, when you wash on a Sabbath morning, that your soul needs washing in another laver; and, when your person is decked for church, that you need other robes— robes fairer than worm spins or shuttles weave, or the wealth of banks can buy. See that by faith ye put on that righteousness, even that righteousness of Jesus Christ, in which God Bees neither spot, nor stain, nor any such thing.

II. The nature of this defilement.

It is internal. Like snow drift when it has leveled the churchyard mounds, and, glistening in the winter sun, lies so pure, and fair, and beautiful above the dead, who fester and rot below, a very plausible profession, wearing the semblance of innocence, may conceal from human eyes the foulest heart-corruption.

The grass grows green upon a mountain that holds a volcano in its bowels. Behind the rosy cheek and soft lustrous eye of beauty, how often does there lurk a deadly disease, the deadliest of all! Internal, but all the more dangerous that they are internal, such diseases are the last to be suspected or believed in by their victims, and the hardest to cure. To other than a skillful eye, or a mother's anxious look, this fair and graceful form never wears bloom of higher health, nor moves in more fascinating charms, nor wins more admiring eyes, than when fell consumption, like a miner working on in darkness, has penetrated the vital organs, and is quietly sapping the foundations of life.

Like these maladies, sin has its seat within.

It is a disease of the heart, and the worst of all heart-complaints. There may be do very alarming appearance on the surface; in the conduct that lies exposed to the eyes of man there may be little offensive to holiness, yet this fair exterior affords no criterion, no sure or certain test by which to judge of matters within.

Thanks indeed be to God, and praise to his sovereign grace, if sin does not find unchallenged entrance, and meet a cordial welcome in our inner man; yet how constant and arduous is the fight which even gracious men have to maintain against the tendency to secret errors ! The old man has been nailed to the tree, but how difficult to keep him there!

How difficult to keep pollution down, and maintain a current of pure and hallowed desires flowing through the channels of the heart! In judging ourselves that we be not judged, beware how you trust to outward appearances. What if it should be with us as with this calm pool, which seems so clean, nay, with heaven mirrored in its face, so beautiful? Let some temptation stir up our passions, (and how little does it need to stir them!) and those pure, pellucid waters now grow foul and noisome; and, sending forth the most offensive odors, prove what vile pollution may lie beneath the fairest surface.

Think not that the evil is accidental— that it lies, as some say, in education, in temptation, in eternal causes: it is traceable to the heart itself. What more harmless than temptations—this fiery dart launched by Satan’s hand—that flaming arrow from his bow—if they fell like sparks in water? But alas! they fall like a torch into a magazine of combustibles.

Knowing this, and jealous of themselves, let God’s people watch and pray that they enter not into temptation. To life’s last step, with life’s latest breath, be this your prayer, **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** It is another prayer, indeed, that the sinner has to offer. He has not to seek that his heart may be kept clean, but made clean; it is not health preserved, but restored, you want; you need not food, but medicine; a new nature, heart, life: this the prayer that suits your lips and ease: **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”**

This defilement is universal.

Our world is inhabited by various races of men— different specimens, not different species. The Malay, the Negro, the race early cradled among Caucasian mountains, and the Red Indians of the New World; these all differ from each other in the color of the skin, in the contour of the skull, in the cast and character of their features. Whence came these different races? The Bible says that **“God made of one blood all the families of the earth.”**

According to its authority they are all sprung of one pair, who were located in a garden some where in the distant east. There, in that central and elevated region of the old world, man was both made and redeemed; there the cradle of our race was rocked, and the cross of salvation raised; and, breaking forth in an eastern region, the lights of knowledge and religion, learning human and divine, letters, science, and arts have, as by a law of nature, followed the track of the sun.

The origin of these different races is a question of no small importance, and has formed a battleground between the enemies and defenders of our faith; one long and obstinately contested.

If, in order to account for these different races on the principles of unchallengeable physiology, it could be proved, that Europe, Africa, and America must, as well as Asia, have had their parent pairs; if it could be proved that there must of necessity have been as many Adams as there are races of men, then it is plain that we must yield up the divine authority of the Bible, and read the story of Moses as an old-world fable—some fragment of Egyptian wisdom which he had embalmed in the page of Genesis.

Infidelity, quick to see what would serve her purpose, has attempted to prove this, and challenged religion to meet her on the field of science. Her challenge has been accepted. Men-at-arms in the ranks of the faith have taken up the gauntlet; the battle has been fought, and fought out; and now, to the confusion and complete discomfiture of the infidel, it stands demonstrated, that in this question as in others, science is in perfect harmony with revelation.

Dismissing all Adams but one, she demands no more than the Bible grants, will receive no more than it offers, believe no more than it reveals; concluding that all these varieties of the human family are, in the providence of God, and in the hands of an Omnipotence which delights in variety, the offspring of a single pair.

There is one argument which these unhired, impartial, and independent defenders of our faith—these high-priests of science—did not, perhaps, feel warranted to employ, but which presents to us the most convincing evidence of a common origin. It lies where the tests of chemistry cannot detect it, nor the knife of the anatomist reach it, nor the eye of the physiognomist discover it, nor the instruments of the phrenologist measure it. Its place is in the inner man; it lies in the depths of the soul; and comes out in this remarkable fact, that, although the hues of the skin differ, and the form of the skull and the features of the face are cast in different moulds, the features, color, and character of the heart are the same in all men.

Be he pale-faced or red, tawny or black, Jew, Greek, Scythian, bond or free; whether he be the civilized inhabitant of Europe, or roam a painted savage in American woods, pant beneath the burning line, or, wrapt in furs, shiver amid the Arctic snows; as in all classes of society, so in all races of men, to quote the words of the prophet, “**the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;**” or, in the no less emphatic language of the Apostle, “**the carnal mind is enmity against God.**”

The pendulum vibrates slower at the equator than the pole; the further north we push our way over thick-ribbed ice, the clock goes the faster; but parallels of latitude have no modifying influence on the motions of the heart. It beats the same in all men; nor, till repaired by grace, does it in any beat true to God. In Adam all have died— have sinned, and therefore died.

Sin, like our atmosphere, embraces the world. Like death, it is universal; its empire is coeval and co-extensive with that of the king of terrors. And how can it be otherwise? If man is the child of unholy parents, how can a clean thing come out of an unclean?

When water of its own accord shall rise above its fountain, then may Adam's children possess a nature loftier than his own.

The tree is diseased, not at the top, but at the root; and, therefore, no branch of the human family can by possibility escape being affected by sin. Is anything more plain and palpable than this, that if the fountain was polluted, to whatever quarter of the world the stream of population flowed, it must have borne pollution in its bosom? Is suffering the sure index of sin? Then, if there be no country beneath the sun where signs of suffering are not seen, and its sounds are not heard, sin is everywhere— is in every man.

Be they dug in Arctic snows, or in the desert sands, there is no land without its graves; nor, wherever it stands, a city without its cemetery. Be they monarchies or republics, unaffected by the revolutions that cast down other dynasties, death reigns in them all—a king of kings Death sits on the world's oldest throne.

Suffering the stings of conscience, sin and serpent-bitten, man is condemned by a voice within him; there sits a divinity enthroned in every man's soul, whose voice is the clear, articulate and solemn echo of this judgment, **“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”**

This evil is incurable.

Hear the Word of the Lord: **“Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord.”**

Again,

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye that have been accustomed, to do evil learn to do well.”

Again,

“Why should ye be stricken any more, ye will revolt more and more?”

Of these solemn and humbling truths I know no more remarkable illustration than that before us.

What effect had God's judgments on his ancient people? Some children owe their ruin to excessive indulgence; others are the victims of an extreme severity, which drives them first to falsehood, and then from that on to other crimes. Thus mismanagement may be laid at our door; but who will impute error to God, or challenge the wisdom of his ways?

Now, when the scourge was in the hands of a God all wise, what effect had it on his people?

- Were they cured by their afflictions, trials, and years of suffering?
- Did these arrest the malady?
- Had they even the effect of preventing their sinking deeper into sin?

By no means. As always happens in incurable diseases, the patient grew worse instead of better. **“Seducers was worse and worse.”**

As always happens when life is gone, the dead grew more and more offensive. The more it shines, and the more it rains, the thicker the dews of night, and the hotter the sun of day, the faster the dead tree rots; for those agents in nature which promote the vegetation and develop the beauty of life, the sounding shower, the silent dews, the summer heat, have no other effect on death than to hasten its putridity and decay.

And even so, famishing us with an impressive lesson of the impotency of all means that are unaccompanied by the divine blessing—was it with God’s ancient people. He sent them servants, and he sent them sufferings; but, until the Spirit of life descended from on high, their habits only grew more depraved, their condition more desperate, their profanity more profane; they but laid themselves more and more open to the charge—**“The last state of that man is worse than the first.”**

Wherever on weary feet they wandered, they dishonored religion, disgraced the faith; and, instead of extorting the respect of their oppressors, they exposed both themselves and their God to contempt.

The heathen sneered and said, “These are the people of the Lord!” and, what is less common, these down-trodden exiles, these debased and degraded sinners, seem themselves to have felt the desperate character of their case; they said, **“Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost.”**

Now, as we may learn from the case of the Jews, the case of every sinner, apart from divine assistance, is a desperate one. This internal and universal defilement is one which neither sorrows nor sufferings can remove. God, in a passage which we have already quoted, says, **“Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me;”** sorrows have no more virtue than soap, tears than nitre here. Trust not, therefore, in any merely unsanctified afflictions, as if these could permanently and really change the true character of the heart.

- I have seen the characters of the writing remain on paper that the flames had turned into a film of buoyant coal;
- I have seen the thread that had been passed through the fire, retain, in its cold gray ashes, the twist which it had got in spinning;
- I have found every shivered splinter of the flint as hard as the unbroken stone: and, let trials come, in providence, sharp as the fire and ponderous as the crushing hammer, unless God send with these something else than these, bruised, broken, bleeding as the heart may be, it remains the same.

You may weep for your sins; and, since all of us have need to seek a more tender conscience, and that this too cold and callous heart were warmed and softened, sorry should I be to atop your weeping. Should a mote of dust get into the natural eye, the irritation induced will weep out the evil; and so, in a way, with sin in a tender and holy conscience.

But tears— an ocean of tears— wash not out the guilt of sin. All tears are lost that fall not at the feet of Jesus. But even the tears which bathe a Saviour's feet wash not away our sins. When falling—flowing fastest, we are to remember that it is not the tears we shed, but the blood he shed, which is the price of pardon; and that guilty souls are nowhere to be cleansed but in that bath of blood where the foulest are free to wash and certain to be cleansed. From its crimson margin a Magdalene and a Manasseh have gone up to glory; and since their times, succeeding ages have been daily and more fully proving, that grace is still free, salvation still full, and that still the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.

“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's vein,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

~ end of chapter 2 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
