

CHAPTER 6


In this chapter we have,

- I.** A threatening of the destruction of Israel for their idolatry, and the destruction of their idols with them (v. 1-7).
- II.** A promise of the gracious return of a remnant of them to God, by true repentance and reformation (v. 8-10).
- III.** Directions given to the prophet and others, the Lord's servants, to lament both the iniquities and the calamities of Israel (v. 11-14).

EZEKIEL 6:1-7

THE DESTRUCTION OF IDOLATRY

Here,

I. The prophecy is directed to *the mountains of Israel* (v. 1, 2); the prophet must *set his face towards* them. If he could see so far off as the land of Israel, *the mountains* of that land would be first and furthest seen; towards them therefore he must look, and look boldly and stedfastly, as the judge looks at the prisoner, and directs his speech to him, when he passes sentence upon him. Though *the mountains of Israel* be ever so high and ever so strong, he must *set his face against* them, as having judgments to denounce that should shake their foundation. *The mountains of Israel* had been *holy mountains*, but now that they had polluted them with their high places God set his face against them and therefore the prophet must. Israel is here put, not, as sometimes, for the ten tribes, but for the whole land. *The mountains* are called upon to *hear the word of the Lord*, to shame the inhabitants that would not hear. The prophets might as soon gain attention from the *mountains* as from that *rebellious and gainsaying people*, to whom they all day long *stretched out their hands in vain*. *Hear, O mountains! the Lord's controversy* ( Micah 6:1, 2), for God's cause will have a hearing, whether we hear it or no. But from *the mountains the word of the Lord* echoes to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; for to them also *the Lord God* speaks, intimating that the whole land is concerned in

what is now to be delivered and shall be witnesses against this people that they had fair warning given them of the judgments coming, but they would not take it; nay, they contradicted the message and persecuted the messengers, so that God's prophets might more safely and comfortably speak to *the hills and mountains* than to them.

II. That which is threatened in this prophecy is the utter destruction of the idols and the idolaters, and both by the sword of war. God himself is commander-in-chief of this expedition against *the mountains of Israel*. It is he that says, *Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you* (v. 3); the sword of the Chaldeans is at God's command, goes where he sends it, comes where he brings it, and lights as he directs it. In the desolations of that war,

1. The idols and all their appurtenances should be destroyed. The *high places*, which were on the tops of mountains (v. 3), shall be levelled *and made desolate* (v. 6); they shall not be beautified, shall not be frequented as they had been. The *altars*, on which they offered sacrifice and burnt incense to strange gods, *shall be broken* to pieces and *laid waste*; the *images and idols* shall be defaced, *shall be broken and cease*, and be cut down, and all the fine costly works about them shall be abolished, v. 4, 6. Observe here,

(1.) That war makes woeful desolations, which those persons, places, and things that were esteemed most sacred cannot escape; for *the sword devours one as well as another*.

(2.) That God sometimes ruins idolatries even by the hands of idolaters, for such the Chaldeans themselves were; but, as if the deity were a local thing, the greatest admirers of the gods of their own country were the greatest despisers of the gods of other countries.

(3.) It is just with God to make that a desolation which we make an idol of; for he is a jealous God and will not bear a rival.

(4.) If men do not, as they ought, destroy idolatry, God will, first or last, find out a way to do it. When Josiah had destroyed the high places, altars, and images, with the sword of justice, they set them up again; but God will now destroy them with the sword of war, and let us see who dares re-establish them.

2. The worshippers of idols and all their adherents should be destroyed likewise. As *all their high places shall be laid waste*, so shall all *their dwelling-places* too, even *all their cities*, v. 6. Those that profane God's dwelling-place as they had done can expect no other than that he should abandon theirs, ^{<ART>}Ezekiel 5:11. *If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy*, ^{<ART>}1 Corinthians 3:17. It is here threatened that *their slain shall fall in the midst of them* (v. 7); there shall be abundance slain, even in those places which were thought most safe; but it is added as a remarkable circumstance that they shall fall *before their idols* (v. 4), that their *dead carcasses* should be *laid*, and their *bones scattered, about their altars*, v. 5.

(1.) Thus their idols should be polluted, and those places profaned by the dead bodies which they had had in veneration. If they will not *defile the covering of their graven images*, God will, ^{<ART>}Isaiah 30:22. The throwing of the carcasses among them, as upon the dunghill, intimates that they were but dunghill-deities.

(2.) Thus it was intimated that they were but dead things, unfit to be rivals with *the living God*; for the carcasses of dead men, that, like them, *have eyes and see not, ears and hear not*, were the fittest company for them.

(3.) Thus the idols were upbraided with their inability to help their worshippers, and idolaters were upbraided with the folly of trusting in them; for, it should seem, they fell by the sword of the enemy when they were actually before their idols imploring their aid and putting themselves under their protection. Sennacherib was slain by his sons when he was *worshipping in the house of his god*.

(4.) The sin might be read in this circumstance of the punishment; the *slain men* are *cast before the idols*, to show that *therefore* they are slain, because they worshipped those idols; see ^{<ART>}Jeremiah 8:1, 2. let the survivors observe it, and take warning not to worship images; let them see it, and know that *God is the Lord*, that *the Lord he is God* and he alone.

~~2068~~ EZEKIEL 6:8-10

MERCY PROMISED TO THE PENITENT

Judgment had hitherto triumphed, but in these verses mercy rejoices against judgment. A sad end is made of this provoking people, but not a full end. The ruin seems to be universal, and *yet will I leave a remnant*, a little remnant, distinguished from the body of the people, a few of many, such as are left when the rest perish; and it is God that leaves them. This intimates that they deserved to be cut off with the rest, and would have been cut off if God had not left them. See ~~2109~~ Isaiah 1:9. And it is God who by his grace works that in them which he has an eye to in sparing them. Now,

I. It is a preserved remnant, saved from the ruin which the body of the nation is involved in (v. 8): *That you may have some who shall escape the sword.* God said (~~2652~~ Ezekiel 5:12) that he would *draw a sword after those who were scattered*, that destruction should pursue them in their dispersion; but here is *mercy remembered in the midst of that wrath*, and a promise that some of *the Jews of the dispersion*, as they were afterwards called, should *escape the sword*. None of those who were to *fall by the sword about Jerusalem shall escape*; for they trust to Jerusalem's walls for security, and shall be made ashamed of that vain confidence. but some of them *shall escape the sword among the nations*, where, being deprived of all other stays, they stay themselves upon God only. They are said to *have those who shall escape*; for they shall be the seed of another generation, out of which Jerusalem shall flourish again.

II. It is a penitent remnant (v. 9): *Those who escape of you shall remember me.* Note, To those whom god designs for life he will give *repentance unto life*. They are reprieved, and *escape the sword*, that they may have time to return to God. Note, God's patience both leaves room for repentance and is an encouragement to sinners to repent. Where God designs grace to repent he allows space to repent; yet many who have the space want the grace, many who *escape the sword* do not forsake the sin, as it is promised that these shall do. This remnant, here marked for salvation, is a type of the remnant reserved out of the body of mankind to be monuments of mercy, who are made safe in the same way that these were, by being brought to repentance. Now observe here,

1. The occasion of their repentance, and that is a mixture of judgment and mercy — judgment, that they were *carried captives*, but mercy, that they *escaped the sword* in the land of their captivity. They were driven out of their own land, but not out of the land of the living, *not chased out of the world*, as other were and they deserved to be. Note, The consideration of the just rebukes of Providence we are under, and yet of the mercy mixed with them, should engage us to repent, that we may answer God's end in both. And true repentance shall be accepted of God, though we are brought to it by our troubles; nay, sanctified afflictions often prove means of conversion, as to Manasseh.

2. The root and principle of their repentance: *They shall remember me among the nations*. Those who *forgot God* in the land of their peace and prosperity, who *waxed fat and kicked*, were brought to remember him in the land of their captivity. The prodigal son never bethought himself of his father's house till he was ready to perish for hunger in the far country. Their remembering God was the first step they took in returning to him. Note, Then there begins to be some hopes of sinners when they have sinned against, and to enquire, *Where is God my Maker?* Sin takes rise in forgetting God, ~~2018~~ Jeremiah 3:21. Repentance takes rise from the remembrance of him and of our obligations to him. God says, *They shall remember me*, that is, “I will give them grace to do so;” for otherwise they would for ever forget him. That grace shall find them out wherever they are, and by bringing God to their mind shall bring them to their right mind. The prodigal, when he remembered his father, remembered how he has *sinned against Heaven and before him*; so do these penitents.

(1.) They remember the base affront they had put upon God by their idolatries, and this is that which an ingenuous repentance fastens upon and most sadly laments. They had departed from God to idols, and given that honour to pretended deities, the creatures of men's fancies and the work of men's hands, which they should have given to the God of Israel. They *departed from God*, from his word, which they should have made their rule, from his work, which they should have made their business. *Their hearts departed from him*. The heart, which he requires and insists upon, and without which *bodily exercise profits nothing*, the *heart*, which should be set upon him, and carried out towards him, when that *departs from him*, is as the treacherous elopement of a wife from her husband or the rebellious revolt of a subject from his sovereign. *Their eyes also go after their idols*; they doted on them, and had great expectations from them.

Their hearts followed their eyes in the choice of their gods (they must have gods that they could see), and then their eyes followed their hearts in the adoration of them. Now the malignity of this sin is that it is spiritual whoredom; it is a *whorish heart* that *departs from God*; and they are *eyes* that *go a whoring after their idols*. Note, Idolatry is spiritual whoredom; it is the breach of a marriage-covenant with God; it is the setting of the affections upon that which is a rival with him, and the indulgence of a base lust, which deceives and defiles the soul, and is a great wrong to God in his honour,

(2.) They remember what a grief this was to him and how he resented it. They shall remember *that I am broken with their whorish heart and their eyes* that are full of this spiritual adultery, not only angry at it, but grieved, as a husband is at the lewdness of a wife whom he dearly loved, grieved to such a degree that he is broken with it; it breaks his heart to think that he should be so disingenuously dealt with; he is broken as an aged father is with the undutiful behaviour of a rebellious and disobedient son, which sinks his spirits and makes him to stoop. *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation,* ^{<195D>}Psalm 95:10. *God's measures were broken* (so some); a stop was put to the current of his favours towards them, and he was even compelled to punish them. This they shall remember in the day of their repentance, and it shall affect and humble them more than any thing, not so much that their peace was broken, and their country broken, as *that God was broken* by their sin. Thus *they shall look on him whom they have pierced and shall mourn,* ^{<32D>}Zechariah 12:10. Note, Nothing grieves a true penitent so much as to think that his sin has been a grief to God and to the Spirit of his grace.

3. The product and evidence of their repentance: *They shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations*. Thus God will give them grace to qualify them for pardon and deliverance. Though he had been *broken by their whorish heart*, yet he would not quite cast them off. See ^{<257D>}Isaiah 57:17, 18; ^{<30D>}Hosea 2:13, 14. His goodness takes occasion from their badness to appear the more illustrious. note,

(1.) True penitents see sin to be an abominable thing, that *abominable thing which the Lord hates* and which makes sinners, and even their services, odious to him, ^{<24D>}Jeremiah 44:4; ^{<20D>}Isaiah 1:11. It defiles the sinner's own conscience, and makes him, unless he be past feeling, an

abomination to himself. An idol is particularly called *an abomination*, ^{Isaiah 44:19}. Those gratifications which the hearts of sinners were set upon as delectable things the hearts of penitents are turned against as detestable things.

(2.) There are many *evils committed in these abominations*, many included in them, attendant on them, and flowing from them, many transgressions in one sin, ^{Leviticus 16:21}. In their idolatries they were sometimes guilty of whoredom (as in the worship of Peor), sometimes of murder (as in the worship of Moloch); these were *evils committed in their abominations*. Or it denotes the great malignity there is in sin; it is an abomination that has abundance of evil in it.

(3.) Those that truly loathe sin cannot but loathe themselves because of sin; self-loathing is evermore the companion of true repentance. Penitents quarrel with themselves, and can never be reconciled to themselves till they have some ground to hope that God is reconciled to them; nay, *then* they shall lie down in their shame, when he is pacified towards them, ^{Ezekiel 16:63}.

4. The glory that will redound to God by their repentance (v. 10): “*They shall know that I am the Lord; they shall be convinced of it by experience, and shall be ready to own it, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them, finding that what I have said is made good, and made to work for good, and to answer a good intention, and that it was not without just provocation that they were thus threatened and thus punished.*” Note,

(1.) One way or other God will make sinners to know and own that he is the lord, either by their repentance or by their ruin.

(2.) All true penitents are brought to acknowledge both the equity and the efficacy of the word of God, particularly the threatenings of the word, and to justify God in them and in the accomplishment of them.

EZEKIEL 6:11-14

THE PROPHET'S LAMENTATION

The same threatenings which we had before in the foregoing chapter, and in the former part of this, are here repeated, with a direction to the prophet to lament them, that those he prophesied to might be the more affected with the foresight of them.

I. He must by his gestures in preaching express the deep sense he had both of the iniquities and of the calamities of the house of Israel (v. 11): *Smite with thy hand and stamp with thy foot*. Thus he must make it to appear that he was in earnest in what he said to them, that he firmly believed it and laid it to heart. Thus he must signify the just displeasure he had conceived at their sins, and the just dread he was under of the judgments coming upon them. Some would reject this use of these gestures, and call them antic and ridiculous; but God bids him use them because they might help to enforce the word upon some and give it the setting on; and those that know the worth of souls will be content to be laughed at by the wits, so they may but edify the weak. Two things the prophet must thus lament: —

1. National sins. *Alas! for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel*. Note, The sins of sinners are the sorrows of God's faithful servants, especially the *evil abominations of the house of Israel*, whose sins are more abominable and have more evil in them than the sins of others. *Alas! What will be in the end hereof?*

2. National judgments. To punish them for these abominations *they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence*. Note, It is our duty to be affected not only with our own sins and sufferings, but with the sins and sufferings of others; and to look with compassion upon the miseries that wicked people bring upon themselves; as Christ *beheld Jerusalem and wept over it*.

II. He must inculcate what he had said before concerning the destruction that was coming upon them.

1. They shall be run down and ruined by a variety of judgments which shall find them out and follow them wherever they are (v. 12): *He that is far off*, and thinks himself out of danger, because out of the reach of the

Chaldeans' arrows, shall find himself not out of the reach of God's arrows, which fly day and night (^{<1915>}Psalm 91:5): *He shall die of the pestilence. He that is near a place of strength, which he hopes will be to him a place of safety, shall fall by the sword, before he can retreat. He that is so cautious as not to venture out, but remains in the city, shall there die by the famine, the saddest death of all. Thus will God accomplish his fury, that is, do all that against them which he had purposed to do.*

2. They shall read their sin in their punishment; for *their slain men shall be among their idols, round about their altars*, as was threatened before, v. 5-7. There, where they had prostrated themselves in honour of their idols, God will lay them dead, to their own reproach and the reproach of their idols. They lived among them and shall die among them. They had offered sweet odours to their idols, but there shall their dead carcasses send forth an offensive smell, as it were to atone for that misplaced incense.

3. The country shall be all laid waste, as, before, *the cities* (v. 6): *I will make the land desolate*. That fruitful, pleasant, populous country, that has been as the garden of the Lord, the glory of all lands, shall be *desolate, more desolate than the wilderness towards Diblath*, v. 14. It is called Diblathaim (^{<0835>}Numbers 33:46; ^{<2482>}Jeremiah 48:22), that *great and terrible wilderness* which is described, ^{<0885>}Deuteronomy 8:15, wherein were *fiery serpents and scorpions*. The land of Canaan is at this day one of the most barren desolate countries in the world. City and country are thus depopulated, *that the altars may be laid waste and made desolate*, v. 6. Rather than their idolatrous altars shall be left standing, both town and country shall be laid in ruins. Sin is a desolating thing; therefore *stand in awe and sin not*.