

CHAPTER 15

Ezekiel has again and again, in God's name, foretold the utter ruin of Jerusalem; but, it should seem, he finds it hard to reconcile himself to it, and to acquiesce in the will of God in this severe dispensation; and therefore God takes various methods to satisfy him not only that it shall be so, but that there is no remedy: it must be so; it is fit that it should be so. Here, in this short chapter, he shows him (probably with design that he should tell the people) that it was as requisite Jerusalem should be destroyed as that the dead and withered branches of a vine should be cut off and thrown into the fire.

- I. The similitude is very elegant (v. 1-5), but,
- II. The explanation of the similitude is very dreadful (v. 6-8).

~~351~~ EZEKIEL 15:1-8

JERUSALEM A CONDEMNED VINE

The prophet, we may suppose, was thinking what a glorious city Jerusalem was, above any city in the world; it was the crown and *joy of the whole earth*; and therefore what a pity it was that it should be destroyed; it was a noble structure, the city of God, and the city of Israel's solemnities. But, if these were the thoughts of his heart, God here returns an answer to them by comparing Jerusalem to a vine.

1. It is true, if a vine be fruitful, it is a most valuable tree, none more so; it was one of those that were courted to have dominion over the trees, and the fruit of it is such as *cheers God and man* (~~312~~Judges 9:12, 13); *it makes glad the heart*, ~~345~~Psalm 104:15. So Jerusalem was *planted a choice and noble vine, wholly a right seed* (~~342~~Jeremiah 2:21); and, if it had brought forth fruit suitable to its character as a holy city, it would have been the glory both of God and Israel. It was a vine which *God's right hand had planted, a branch out of a dry ground*, which, though its original was mean and despicable, God had *made strong for himself* (~~385~~Psalm 80:15), to be *to him for a name and for a praise*.

2. But, if it be not fruitful, it is good for nothing, it is as worthless and useless a production of the earth as even thorns and briars are: *What is the vine-tree*, if you take the tree by itself, without consideration of the fruit? *What is it more than any tree*, that it should have so much care taken of it and so much cost laid out upon it? What is a branch of the vine, though it spread *more than a branch which is among the trees of the forest*, where it grows neglected and exposed? Or, as some read it, *What is the vine more than any tree if the branch of it be as the trees of the forest*; that is, if it bear no fruit, as forest-trees seldom do, being designed for timber-trees, not fruit-trees? Now there are some fruit-trees which, if they do not bear, are nevertheless of good use, as the wood of them may be made to turn to a good account; but the vine is not of this sort: if that do not answer its end as a fruit-tree, it is worth nothing as a timber-tree. Observe,

I. How this similitude is expressed here. The wild vine, that *is among the trees of the forest*, or the empty vine (which Israel is compared to, ³⁰⁰Hosea 10:1), that bears no more fruit than a forest-tree, is good for nothing; it is as useless as a brier, and more so, for that will add some sharpness to the thorny hedge, which the vine-branch will not do. He shows,

1. That it is fit for no use. The *wood* of it is not *taken to do any work*; one cannot so much as make *a pin of it to hand a vessel upon*, v. 3. See how variously the gifts of nature are dispensed for the service of man. Among the plants, the roots of some, the seeds or fruits of others, the leaves of others, and of some the stalks, are most serviceable to us; so, among trees, some are strong and not fruitful, as the oaks and cedars; others are weak but very fruitful, as the vine, which is unsightly, low, and depending, yet of great use. Rachel is comely but barren, Leah homely but fruitful.

2. That therefore it is made use of *for fuel*; it will serve to heat the oven with. Because *it is not meet for any work, it is cast into the fire*, v. 4. When it is good for nothing else it is useful this way, and answers a very needful intention, *for fuel* is a thing we must have, and to burn any thing for fuel which is good for other work is bad husbandry. *To what purpose is this waste?* The unfruitful vine is disposed of in the same way with the briars and thorns, which are rejected, and *whose end is to be burnt*, ³⁰⁸Hebrews 6:8. And what care is taken of it then? If a piece of solid timber be kindled, somebody perhaps may snatch it *as a brand out of the burning*, and say, "It is a pity to burn it, for it may be put to some better

use;” but if the branch of a vine be on fire, and, as usual, both the ends of it and the middle be kindled together, nobody goes about to save it. *When it was whole it was meet for no work, much less when the fire has devoured it* (v. 5); even the ashes of it are not worth saving.

II. How this similitude is applied to Jerusalem.

1. That holy city had become unprofitable and good for nothing. It had been as *the vine-tree among the trees of the vineyard*, abounding in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God. When religion flourished there, and the pure worship of God was kept up, many a joyful vintage was then gathered in from it; and, while it continued so, God made a hedge about it; it was his *pleasant plant* (^{238F}Isaiah 5:7); he *watered it every moment and kept it night and day* (^{237B}Isaiah 27:3); but it had now become *the degenerate plant of a strange vine*, of a wild vine (such as we read of ^{416B}2 Kings 4:39), *a vine-tree among the trees of the wild grapes* (^{238A}Isaiah 5:4), which are not only of no use, but are nauseous and noxious (^{483D}Deuteronomy 32:32), *their grapes are grapes of gall, and their clusters are bitter*. It is explained (v. 8): “*They have trespassed a trespass*, that is, they have treacherously prevaricated with God and perfidiously apostatized from him;” for so the word signifies. Note, Professors of religion, if they do not live up to their profession, but contradict it, if they degenerate and depart from it, are the most unprofitable creatures in the world, like the *salt* that has *lost its savour* and is thenceforth *good for nothing*, ^{410B}Mark 9:50. Other nations were famed for valour or politics, some for war, others for trade, and retained their credit; but the Jewish nation, being famous as a holy people, when they lost their holiness, and became wicked, were thenceforth *good for nothing*; with that they lost all their credit and usefulness, and became the most base and despicable people under the sun, *trodden under foot of the Gentiles*. Daniel, and other pious Jews, were of great use in their generation; but the idolatrous Jews then, and the unbelieving Jews now since the preaching of the gospel, have been, and are, of no common service, not fit *for any work*.

2. Being so, it is *given to the fire for fuel*, v. 6. Note, Those who are not fruitful to the glory of God's grace will be fuel to the fire of his wrath; and thus, if they give not honour to him, he will *get himself honour upon them*, honour that will shine brightly in that flaming fire by which impenitent sinners will be for ever consumed. He will not be a loser at last by any of his creatures. *The Lord has made all things for himself*, yea, even the

wicked, that would not otherwise be for him, *for the day of evil* (^{<2164>}Proverbs 16:4); and in those who would not glorify him as *the God to whom duty belongs* he will be glorified as *the God to whom vengeance belongs*. The fire of God's wrath had before *devoured both the ends of the Jewish nation* (v. 4), Samaria and the cities of Judah; and now Jerusalem, that was *the midst of it*, was thrown *into the fire*, to be *burnt* too, for *it is meet for no work*; it will not be wrought upon, by any of the methods God has taken, to be serviceable to him. *The inhabitants of Jerusalem* were like a vine-branch, rotten and awkward; and therefore (v. 7), “*I will set my face against them, to thwart all their counsels,*” as they set their faces against God, to contradict his word and defeat all his designs. It is decreed; the consumption is determined: *I will make the land quite desolate*, and therefore, when they *go out from one fire, another fire shall devour them* (v. 7); the end of one judgment shall be the beginning of another, and their escape from one only a reprieve till another comes; they shall go from misery in their own country to misery in Babylon. Those who kept out of the way of the sword perished by famine or pestilence. When one descent of the Chaldean forces upon them was over, and they thought, *Surely the bitterness of death is past*, yet soon after they returned again with double violence, till they had made a full end. Thus *they shall know that I am the Lord*, a God of almighty power, *when I set my face against them*. Note, God shows himself to be *the Lord*, by perfecting the destruction of his implacable enemies as well as the deliverances of his obedient people. Those whom God *sets his face*, though they may come out of one trouble little hurt, will fall into another; though they *come out of the pit*, they will be *taken in the snare* (^{<2248>}Isaiah 24:18); though they escape *the sword of Hazeel*, they will fall by that of Jehu (^{<1197>}1 Kings 19:17); for *evil pursues sinners*. Nay, though they *go out from the fire* of temporal judgments, and seem to die in peace, yet there is an everlasting fire that will *devour them*; for, *when God judges*, first or last *he will overcome*, and he will be *known by the judgments which he executes*. See ^{<4180>}Matthew 3:10; ^{<4816>}John 15:6.