

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter we have a further, and no less terrible, denunciation of the judgments of God, which were coming with all speed and force upon the Jewish nation, which would utterly ruin it; for when God judges he will overcome. This destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is here,

I. Represented by a sign, the cutting, and burning, and scattering of hair (v. 1-4).

II. That sign is expounded, and applied to Jerusalem.

1. Sin is charged upon Jerusalem as the cause of this desolation — contempt of God's law (v. 5-7) and profanation of his sanctuary (v. 11).

2. Wrath is threatened, great wrath (v. 8-10), a variety of miseries (v. 12, 16, 17), such as should be their reproach and ruin (v. 13-15).

EZEKIEL 5:1-4

THE REPRESENTATION OF JERUSALEM'S RUIN

We have here the sign by which the utter destruction of Jerusalem is set forth; and here, as before, the prophet is himself the sign, that the people might see how much he affected himself with, and interested himself in, the case of Jerusalem, and how it lay to his heart, even when he foretold the desolations of it. he was so much concerned about it as to take what was done to it as done to himself, so far was he from desiring the woeful day.

I. He must *shave off the hair of his head and beard* (v. 1), which signified God's utter rejecting and abandoning that people, as a useless worthless generation, such as could well be spared, nay, such as it would be his honour to part with; his judgments, and all the instruments he made use of in cutting them off, were this *sharp knife* and this *razor*, that were proper to be made use of, and would do execution. Jerusalem had been the head, but, having degenerated, had become as the *hair*, which, when it grows thick and long, is but a burden which a man wishes to get clear of, as God

of the sinners in Zion. *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries,* ²⁰²¹ Isaiah 1:24. Ezekiel must not cut off that hair only which was superfluous, but *cut it all off*, denoting the full end that God would make of Jerusalem. The hair that would not be trimmed and kept neat and clean by the admonitions of the prophets must be all shaved off by utter destruction. Those will be ruined that will not be reformed.

II. He must *weigh the hair and divide it into three parts*. This intimates the very exact directing of God's judgments according to equity (by him men and their actions are *weighed* in the unerring balance of truth and righteousness) and the proportion which divine justice observes in punishing some by one judgment and others by another; one way or other, they shall all be met with. Some make the shaving of the hair to denote the loss of their liberty and of their honour: it was looked upon as a mark of ignominy, as in the disgrace Hanun put on David's ambassadors. It denotes also the loss of their joy, for they shaved their heads upon occasion of great mourning; I may add the loss of their Nazariteship, for the shaving of the head was a period to that vow (⁴⁰¹⁸ Numbers 6:18), and Jerusalem was now no longer looked upon as a *holy city*.

III. He must dispose of the hair so that it might all be destroyed or dispersed, v. 2.

1. One *third part must be burnt in the midst of the city*, denoting the multitudes that should perish by famine and pestilence, and perhaps many in the conflagration of the city, *when the days of the siege were fulfilled*. Or the laying of that glorious city in ashes might well be looked upon as a third part of the destruction threatened.

2. Another third part was to be *cut in pieces with a knife*, representing the many who, during the siege, were slain by the sword, in their sallies out upon the besiegers, and especially when the city was taken by storm, the Chaldeans being then most furious and the Jews most feeble.

3. Another third part was to be *scattered in the wind*, denoting the carrying away of some into the land of the conqueror and the flight of others into the neighbouring countries for shelter; so that they were hurried, some one way and some another, like loose hairs in the wind. But, lest they should think that this dispersion would be their escape, God adds, *I will draw out a sword after them*, so that wherever they go evil shall pursue them. Note,

God has variety of judgments wherewith to accomplish the destruction of a sinful people and to make an end when he begins.

IV. He must preserve a small quantity of the third sort that were to be *scattered in the wind, and bind them in his skirts*, as one would bind that which he is very mindful and careful of, v. 3. This signified perhaps that little handful of people which were left under the government of Gedaliah, who, it was hoped, would keep possession of the land when the body of the people was carried into captivity. Thus God would have done well for them if they would have done well for themselves. But these few that were reserved must be taken and *cast into the fire*, v. 4. When Gedaliah and his friends were slain the people that put themselves under his protection were scattered, some gone into Egypt, others carried off by the Chaldeans, and in short the land totally cleared of them; then this was fulfilled, for out of those combustions *a fire came forth into all the house of Israel*, who, as fuel upon the fire, kindled and consumed one another. Note, It is ill with a people when those are taken away in wrath that seemed to be marked for monuments of mercy; for then there is no remnant or escaping, none shut up or left.

~~3155~~ EZEKIEL 5:5-17

THE GUILT AND PUNISHMENT OF JERUSALEM

We have here the explanation of the foregoing similitude: *This is Jerusalem*. Thus it is usual in scripture language to give the name of the thing signified to the sign; as when Christ said, *This is my body*. The prophet's head, which was to be shaved, signified Jerusalem, which by the judgments of God was now to be stripped of all its ornaments, to be emptied of all its inhabitants, and to be set *naked and bare*, to be *shaved with a razor that is hired*, ~~3157~~ Isaiah 7:20. The head of one that was a priest, a prophet, a holy person, was fittest to represent Jerusalem the holy city. Now the contents of these verses are much the same with what we have often met with, and still shall, in the writings of the prophets. Here we have,

I. The privileges Jerusalem was honoured with (v. 5): *I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her*, and those

famous nations and very considerable. Jerusalem was not situated in a remote obscure corner of the world, far from neighbours, but in the midst of kingdoms that were populous, polite, and civilized, famed for learning, arts, and sciences, and which then made the greatest figure in the world. But there seems to be more in it than this.

1. Jerusalem was dignified and preferred above the neighbouring nations and their cities. it was *set in the midst* of them as excelling them all. This *holy mountain was exalted above all the hills*, ^{<302>}Isaiah 2:2. *Why leap you, you high hills? This is the hill which God desires to dwell in*, ^{<186>}Psalms 68:16. Jerusalem was a city upon a hill, conspicuous and illustrious, and which all the neighbouring nations had an eye upon, some for good-will, some for ill-will.

2. Jerusalem was designed to have a good influence upon *the nations and countries round about*, was set in the midst of them as a candle upon a candlestick, to spread the light of divine revelation, which she was blessed with, to all the dark corners of the neighbouring nations, that from them it might diffuse itself further, even to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem was set *in the midst* of the nations, to be as the heart in the body, to invigorate this dead world with a divine life as well as to enlighten this dark world with a divine light, to be an example of every thing that was good. The nations that observed what excellent *statutes and judgments* they had concluded them to be *a wise and understanding people* (^{<306>}Deuteronomy 4:6), fit to be consulted as an oracle, as they were in Solomon's time, ^{<108>}1 Kings 4:34. And, had they preserved this reputation and made a right use of it, what a blessing would Jerusalem have been to all the nations about! But, failing to be so, the accomplishment of this intention was reserved for its latter days, *when out of Zion went forth the gospel law and the word of the Lord Jesus from Jerusalem*, and there *repentance and remission* began to be preached, and thence the preachers of them *went forth into all nations*. And, when that was done, Jerusalem was levelled with the ground. Note, When places and persons are made great, it is with design that they may do good and that those about them may be the better for them, that their *light may shine before men*.

II. The provocations Jerusalem was guilty of. A very high charge is here drawn up against that city, and proved beyond contradiction sufficient to justify God in seizing its privileges and putting it under military execution.

1. She has *not walked in God's statutes*, nor *kept his judgments* (v. 7); nay, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had *refused his judgments and his statutes* (v. 6); they did not do their duty, nay, they *would not*, they said that they would not. Those *statutes and judgments* which their neighbours admired they despised, which they should have set before their face they cast behind their back. Note, A contempt of the word and law of God opens a door to all manner of iniquity. God's statutes are the terms on which he deals with men; those that refuse his terms cannot expect his favours.

2. She had *changed God's judgments into wickedness* (v. 6), a very high expression of profaneness, that the people had not only broken God's laws, but had so perverted and abused them that they had made them the excuse and colour of their wickedness. They introduced the abominable customs and usages of the heathen, instead of God's institutions; this was *changing the truth of God into a lie* (^{<B12>}Romans 1:25) and the *glory of God into shame*, ^{<B10>}Psalm 4:2. Note, Those that have been well educated, if they live ill, put the highest affront imaginable upon God, as if he were the patron of sin and *his judgments were turned into wickedness*.

3. She had been worse than the neighbouring nations, to whom she should have set a good example: *She has changed my judgments*, by idolatries and false worship, *more than the nations* (v. 6), and she has *multiplied* (that is, multiplied idols and altars, gods and temples, multiplied those things the unity of which was their praise) *more than the nations that were round about*. Israel's God is one, and his name one, his altar one; but they, not content with this one God, multiplied their gods to such a degree that *according to the number of their cities so were their gods*, and their altars were *as heaps in the furrows of the field*; so that they exceeded all their neighbours in having *gods many and lords many*. They corrupted revealed religion more than the Gentiles had corrupted natural religion. Note, If those who have made a profession of religion, and have had a pious education, apostatize from it, they are commonly more profane and vicious than those who never made any profession; they have *seven other spirits more wicked*.

4. She had *not done according to the judgments of the nations*, v. 7. Israel had not acted towards their God, as the nations had acted towards their gods, though they were false gods; they had not been so observant of him nor so constant to him. Has a nation *changed its gods*, or slighted them, so as they have? ^{<B11>}Jeremiah 2:11. or it may refer to their morals; instead of

reforming their neighbors, they came short of them; and many who were of the *uncircumcision kept the righteousness of the law* better than those who were of the *circumcision*, ⁴¹²⁶Romans 2:26, 27. Those who had the light of scripture did not *according to the judgments* of many who had only the light of nature. Note, There are those who are called *Christians* who will in the great day be condemned by the better tempers and better lives of sober heathens.

5. The particular crime charged upon Jerusalem is profaning the holy things, which she had been both entrusted and honoured with (v. 11): *Thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things*, with thy idols and idolatries. The images of their pretended deities, and the groves erected in honour of them, were brought into the temple; and the ceremonies used by idolaters were brought into the worship of God. Thus every thing that is sacred was polluted. Note, Idols are detestable things any where, but more especially so in the sanctuary.

III. The punishments that Jerusalem should fall under for these provocations: *Shall not God visit for these things?* No doubt he shall. The matter of the sentence here passed upon Jerusalem is very dreadful, and the manner of expression makes it yet more so; the judgments are various, and the threatenings of them varied, reiterated, inculcated, that one may well say, *Who is able to stand in God's sight when once he is angry?*

1. God will take this work of punishing Jerusalem into his own hands; and *who knows the power of his anger* and what a fearful thing it is to fall into his hands? Observe what a strong emphasis is laid upon it (v. 8): *I, even I, am against thee*. God had been for Jerusalem, to defend and save it; but miserable is its case when he has turned to be its enemy and fights against it. If God be against us, the whole creation is at war with us, and nothing can be for us so as to stand us in any stead: “You think it is only the Chaldean army that is against you, but they are God's hand, or rather the staff in his hand; it is *I, even I*, that *am against thee*, not only to speak against thee by prophets, but to act against thee by providence. *I will execute judgments in thee* (v. 10), *in the midst of thee* (v. 8), not only in the suburbs, but in the heart of the city, not only in the borders, but in the bowels of the country.” Note, Those who will not observe the judgments of God's mouth shall not escape the judgments of his hand; and God's judgments, when they come with commission, will penetrate into the midst of a people, will enter into the soul, *into the bowels like water* and

like oil into the bones. I will execute judgments. Note, God himself undertakes to execute his own judgments, according to the true and full intent of them; whatever are the instruments, he is the principal agent.

2. These punishments shall come from his displeasure. As to the body of the people, it shall not be a correction in love, but he will *execute judgments in anger, and in fury, and in furious rebukes* (v. 15), strange expressions to come from a God who has said, *Fury is not in me*, and who has declared himself *gracious, and merciful, and slow to anger*. But they are designed to show the malignity of sin, and the offence it gives to the just and holy God. That must needs be a very evil thing which provokes him to such resentments, and against his own people too, that had been so high in his favour, and expressed with so much satisfaction (v. 13): “*My anger, which has long been withheld, shall now be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them;* it shall not only light upon them, but lie upon them, and fill them as vessels of wrath fitted by their own wickedness to destruction; *and, justice being hereby glorified, I will be comforted, I will be entirely satisfied in what I have done.*” As, when God is dishonoured by the sins of men, he is said to be *grieved* (^{<1950>} Psalm 95:10), so when he is honoured by their destruction he is said to *be comforted*. The struggle between mercy and judgment is over, and in this case judgment triumphs, triumphs indeed; for mercy that has been so long abused is now silent and gives up the cause, has not a word more to say on the behalf of such an ungrateful incorrigible people: *My eye shall not spare, neither will I have any pity*, v. 11. Divine compassion defers the punishment, or mitigates it, or supports under it, or shortens it; but here is *judgment without mercy*, wrath without any mixture or allay of pity. These expressions are thus sharpened and heightened perhaps with design to look further, to the vengeance of eternal fire, which some of the destructions we read of in the Old Testament were typical of, and particularly that of Jerusalem; for surely it is nowhere on this side hell that this word has its full accomplishment, *My eye shall not spare*, but *I will cause my fury to rest*. Note, Those who live and die impenitent will perish for ever unpitied; there is a day coming when *the Lord will not spare*.

3. Punishments shall be public and open: *I will execute these judgments in the sight of the nations* (v. 8); the judgments themselves shall be so remarkable that all the nations far and near shall take notice of them; they shall be all the talk of that part of the world, and the more for the conspicuousness of the place and people on which they are inflicted. Note,

Public sins, as they call for public reproofs (*those that sin rebuke before all*), so, if those prevail not, they call for public judgments. *He strikes them as wicked men in the open sight of others* (^{390b}Job 34:26), that he may maintain and vindicate the honour of his government, for (as Grotius descants upon it here) *why should he suffer it to be said, See what wicked lives those lead who profess to be the worshippers of the only true God!* And, as the publicity of the judgments will redound to the honour of God, so it will serve,

(1.) To aggravate the punishment, and to make it lie the more heavily. Jerusalem, being made *waste*, becomes *a reproach among the nations in the sight of all that pass by*, v. 14. The more conspicuous and the more peculiar any have been in the day of their prosperity the greater disgrace attends their fall; and that was Jerusalem's case. The more Jerusalem had been *a praise in the earth* the more it is now *a reproach and a taunt*, v. 15. This she was warned of as much as any thing when her glory commenced (^{190b}1 Kings 9:8), and this was lamented as much as any thing when it was laid in the dust, (²⁰⁵Lamentations 2:15).

(2.) To teach the nations to fear before the God of Israel, when they see what a jealous God he is, and how severely he punishes sin even in those that are nearest to him: *It shall be an instruction to the nations*, v. 15. Jerusalem should have taught her neighbours the fear of God by her piety and virtue, but, she not doing that, God will teach it to them by her ruin; for they have reason to say, *If this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* If judgment begin at the house of God, where will it end? If those be thus punished who only had some idolaters among them, what will become of us who are all idolaters? Note, The destruction of some is designed for the instruction of others. Malefactors are publicly punished *in terrorem* — *that others may take warning*.

4. These punishments, in the kind of them, shall be very severe and grievous.

(1.) They shall be such as have no precedent or parallel. Their sins being more provoking than those of others, the judgments executed upon them should be uncommon (v. 9): *"I will do in thee that which I have not done in thee before, though thou hast long since deserved it; nay, that which I have not done in any other city."* This punishment of Jerusalem is said to be *greater than that of Sodom* (^{200b}Lamentations 4:6), which was more grievous than all that went before it; nay, it is such as *"I will not do any*

more the like, all the circumstances taken in, to any other city, till the like come to be done again to this city, in the final overthrow by the Romans.” This is a rhetorical expression of the most grievous judgments, like that character of Hezekiah, that there was *none like him, before or after him*.

(2.) They shall be such as will force them to break the strongest bonds of natural affection to one another, which will be a just punishment of them for their wilfully breaking the bonds of their duty to God (v. 10): *The fathers shall eat the sons, and the sons shall eat the fathers*, through the extremity of the famine, or shall be compelled to do it by their barbarous conquerors.

(3.) There shall be a complication of judgments, any one of them terrible enough, and desolating; but what then would they be when they came all together and in perfection? Some shall be taken away by the plague (v. 12); the *pestilence shall pass through thee* (v. 17), sweeping all before it, as the destroying angel; others *shall be consumed with famine*, shall gradually waste away as men in a consumption (v. 12); this is again insisted on (v. 16): *I will send upon them the evil arrows of famine*; hunger shall make them pine, and shall pierce them to the heart, as if arrows, *evil arrows*, poisoned darts, were shot into them. God has many arrows, *evil arrows*, in his quiver; when some are discharged, he has still more in reserve. *I will increase the famine upon you*. A famine in a bereaved country may *decrease* as fruits spring forth; but a famine in a besieged city will *increase* of course; yet god speaks of it as his act: “*I will increase it, and will break your staff of bread*, will take away the necessary supports of life, will disappoint you of all that which you depend upon, so that there is no remedy, but you must fall to the ground.” Life is frail, is weak, is burdened, so that, if it have not daily bread for its staff to lean upon, it cannot but sink, and is soon gone if that staff be broken. Others *shall fall by the sword round about Jerusalem*, when they sally out upon the besiegers; it is a *sword* which God *will bring*, v. 17. The sword of the Lord, that used to be drawn for Jerusalem's defence, is now drawn for its destruction. Others are devoured by *evil beasts*, which will make a prey of those that fly for shelter to the deserts and mountains. They shall meet their ruin where they expected refuge, for there is no escaping the judgments of God, v. 17. And, *lastly*, those who escape shall be *scattered into* all parts of the world, *into all the winds* (so it is expressed, v. 10, 12), intimating that they should not only be dispersed, but hurried, and tossed, and driven to and fro, as *chaff before the wind*. Nay, and Cain's

curse (to be fugitives and vagabonds) is not the worst of it neither; their restless life shall be cut off by a bloody death: “*I will draw out a sword after them, which shall follow them wherever they go.*” *Evil pursues sinners*; and the curse shall come upon them and overtake them.

5. These punishments will prove their ruin by degrees. They shall be *diminished* (v. 11); their strength and glory shall grow less and less. They shall be *bereaved* (v. 17), emptied of all that which was their joy and confidence. God sends these judgments on purpose to destroy them, v. 16. The arrows are not sent (as those which Jonathan shot) for their direction, but *for their destruction*; for god will *accomplish his fury upon them* (v. 13); the day of God's patience is over, and the ruin is remediless. Though this prophecy was to have its accomplishment now quickly, in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, yet the executioners not being named here, but the criminal only (*this is Jerusalem*), we may well suppose that it looks further, to the final destruction of that great city by the Romans when God made a full end of the Jewish nation, and *caused his fury to rest upon them*.

6. All this is ratified by the divine authority and veracity: *I the Lord have spoken it*, v. 15 and again v. 17. The sentence is passed by him that is Judge of heaven and earth, whose *judgment is according to truth*, and the judgments of whose hand are according to the judgments of his mouth. he has spoken it who can do it, for with him nothing is impossible. He has spoken it who will do it, for *he is not a man that he should lie*. He has spoken it whom we are bound to hear and heed, whose *ipse dixit* — word commands the most serious attention and submissive assent: *And they shall know that I the Lord have spoken it*, v. 13. There were those who thought it was only the prophet that spoke it in his delirium; but God will make them know, by the accomplishment of it, that he has spoken it in his zeal. Note, Sooner or later, God's word will prove itself.