

CHAPTER 9

The prophet had, in vision, seen the wickedness that was committed at Jerusalem, in the foregoing chapter, and we may be sure that it was not represented to him worse than really it was; now here follows, of course, a representation of their ruin approaching; for when sin goes before judgments come next. Here is,

- I.** Preparation made of instruments that were to be employed in the destruction of the city (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The removal of the Shechinah from the cherubim to the threshold of the temple (v. 3).
- III.** Orders given to one of the persons employed, who is distinguished from the rest, for the marking of a remnant to be preserved from the common destruction (v. 3, 4).
- IV.** The warrant signed for the execution of those that were not marked, and the execution begun accordingly (v. 5-7).
- V.** The prophet's intercession for the mitigation of the sentence, and a denial of any mitigation, the decree having now gone forth (v. 8-10).
- VI.** The report made by him that was to mark the pious remnant of what he had done in that matter (v. 11). And this shows a usual method of Providence in the government of the world.

~~<300>~~ EZEKIEL 9:1-4

PREPARATIONS TO DESTROY JERUSALEM

In these verses we have,

- I.** The summons given to Jerusalem's destroyers to come forth and give their attendance. He that appeared to the prophet (~~<300>~~Ezekiel 8:2), that had brought him to Jerusalem and had shown the wickedness that was done there, *he cried, Cause those that have charge over the city to draw near* (v. 1), or, as it might better be read, and nearer the original, *Those that have charge over the city are drawing near*. He had said (~~<300>~~Ezekiel 8:18),

I will deal in fury; now, says he to the prophet, thou shalt see who are to be employed as the instruments of my wrath. Appropinquaverunt visitationes civitatis — The visitations (or visitors) of the city are at hand. They would not know the day of their visitations in mercy, and now they are to be visited in wrath. Observe,

1. How the notice of this is given to the prophet: *He cried it in my ears with a loud voice*, which intimates the vehemency of him that spoke; when men are highly provoked, and threaten in anger, they speak aloud. Those that regard not the counsels God gives them in a still small voice shall be made to hear the threatenings, to hear and tremble. It denotes also the prophet's unwillingness to be told this: he was deaf on that ear, but there is no remedy, their sin will not admit an excuse and therefore their judgment will not admit a delay: "*He cried it in my ears with a loud voice; he made me hear it, and I heard it with a sad heart.*"

2. What this notice is. There are those *that have charge over the city* to destroy it, not the Chaldean armies, they are to be indeed employed in this work, but they are not the visitors, they are only the servants, or tools rather. God's angels have received a charge now to lay that city waste, which they had long had a charge to protect and watch over. They are at hand, as destroying angels, as ministers of wrath, for *every man has his destroying weapon in his hand*, as the angel that kept the way of the tree of life with a flaming sword. Note, Those that have by sin made God their enemy have made the good angels their enemies too. These visitors are called and *caused to draw near*. Note, God has ministers of wrath always within call, always at command, invisible powers, by whom he accomplishes his purposes. The prophet is made to see this in vision, that he might with the greater assurance in his preaching denounce these judgments. God told it him with a loud voice, *taught it him with a strong hand* (~~281~~ Isaiah 8:11), that it might make the deeper impression upon him and that he might thus proclaim it in the people's ears.

II. Their appearance, upon this summons, is recorded. Immediately *six men came* (v. 2), one for each of the principal gates of Jerusalem. Two destroying angels were sent against Sodom, but six against Jerusalem; for Jerusalem's doom in the judgment will be thrice as heavy as that of Sodom. There is an angel watching at every gate to destroy, to bring in judgments from every quarter, and to take heed that none escape. One angel served to destroy the first-born of Egypt, and the camp of the

Assyrians, but here are six. In the Revelation we find seven that were to *pour out the vials of God's wrath*, ^{<661>}Revelation 16:1. They came with every one *a slaughter-weapon in his hand*, prepared for the work to which they were called. The nations of which the king of Babylon's army was composed, which some reckon to be six, and the commanders of his army (of whom *six* are named as principal, ^{<201>}Jeremiah 39:3), may be called *the slaughter-weapons* in the hands of the angels. The angels are thoroughly furnished for every service.

1. Observe whence they came — *from the way of the higher gate, which lies towards the north* (v. 2), either because the Chaldeans came from the north (^{<201>}Jeremiah 1:14, *Out of the north an evil shall break forth*) or because the image of jealousy was set up *at the door of the inner gate that looks towards the north*, ^{<201>}Ezekiel 8:3, 5. At that gate of the temple the destroying angels entered, to show what it was that opened the door to them. Note, That way that sin lies judgments may be expected to come.

2. Observe where they placed themselves: *They went in and stood beside the brazen altar*, on which sacrifices were wont to be offered and atonement made. When they acted as destroyers they acted as sacrificers, not from any personal revenge or ill-will, but with a pure and sincere regard to the glory of God; for to his justice all they slew were offered up as victims. *They stood by the altar*, as it were to protect and vindicate that, and plead its righteous cause, and avenge the horrid profanation of it. At the altar they were to receive their commission to destroy, to intimate that the iniquity of Jerusalem, like that of Eli's house, was *not to be purged by sacrifice*.

III. The notice taken of one among the destroying angels distinguished in his habit from the rest, from whom some favour might be expected; it should seem he was not one of the six, but *among them*, to see that mercy was mixed with judgment, v. 2. This *man was clothed with linen*, as the priests were, and he had a *writer's inkhorn* hanging at *his side*, as anciently attorneys and lawyers' clerks had, which he was to make use of, as the other six were to make use of their *destroying weapons*. Here the honours of the pen exceeded those of the sword, but he was the Lord of angels that made use of the *writer's inkhorn*; for it is generally agreed, among the best interpreters, that this man represented Christ as Mediator saving those that are his from the flaming sword of divine justice. He is our *high priest*, clothed with holiness, for that was signified by the *fine linen*,

☞ Revelation 19:8. As prophet he wears the *writer's inkhorn*. The book of life is the Lamb's book. The great things of the law and gospel which God has written to us are of his writing; for it is the Spirit of Christ, in the writers of the scripture, that testifies to us, and the Bible is *the revelation of Jesus Christ*. Note, It is a matter of great comfort to all good Christians that, in the midst of the destroyers and the destructions that are abroad, there is a Mediator, a great high priest, who has an interest in heaven, and whom saints on earth have an interest in.

IV. The removal of the appearance of the divine glory from over the cherubim. Some think this was that usual display of the divine glory which was between the cherubim over the mercy seat, in the most holy place, that took leave of them now, and never returned; for it is supposed that it was not in the second temple. Others think it was that display of the divine glory which the prophet now saw over the cherubim in vision; and this is more probable, because this is called *the glory of the God of Israel* (☞ Ezekiel 8:4), and this is it which he had now his eye upon; this was gone *to the threshold of the house*, as it were to call to the servants that attended without the door, to send them on their errand and give them their instructions. And the removal of this, as well as the former, might be significant of God's departure from them, and leaving them their house desolate; and when God goes all good goes, but he goes from none till they first drive him from them. He went at first no further than *the threshold*, that he might show how loth he was to depart, and might give them both time and encouragement to invite his return to them and his stay with them. Note, God's departures from a people are gradual, but gracious souls are soon aware of the first step he takes towards a remove. Ezekiel immediately observed that *the glory of the god of Israel had gone up from the cherub*: and what is a vision of angels if God be gone?

V. The charge given *to the man clothed in linen* to secure the pious remnant from the general desolation. We do not read that this Saviour was summoned and sent for, as the destroyers were; for he is always ready, *appearing in the presence of God for us*; and to him, as the most proper person, the care of those that are marked for salvation is committed, v. 4. Now observe,

1. The distinguishing character of this remnant that is to be saved. They are such as *sigh and cry*, sigh in themselves, as men in pain and distress, cry to God in prayer, as men in earnest, because of *all the abominations*

that are committed in Jerusalem. It was not only the idolatries they were guilty of, but all their other enormities, that were abominations to God. These pious few had witnessed against those abominations and had done what they could in their places to suppress them; but, finding all their attempts for the reformation of manners fruitless, they sat down, and *sighted, and cried*, wept in secret, and complained to God, because of the dishonour done to his name by their wickedness and the ruin it was bringing upon their church and nation. Note, It is not enough that we do not delight in the sins of others, and that we have not fellowship with them, but we must mourn for them, and lay them to heart; we must grieve for that which we cannot help, as those that hate sin for its own sake, and have a tender concern for the souls of others, as David (~~119~~ Psalm 119:136), and Lot, who *vexed his righteous soul* with the wicked conversation of his neighbours. The abominations committed in Jerusalem are to be in a special manner lamented, because they are in a particular manner offensive to God.

2. The distinguishing care taken of them. Orders are given to find those all out that are of such a pious public spirit: “*Go through the midst of the city* in quest of them, and though they are ever so much dispersed, and ever so closely hid from the fury of their persecutors, yet see that you discover them, *and set a mark upon their foreheads,*”

(1.) To signify that God owns them for his, and he will confess them another day. A work of grace in the soul is to God *a mark upon the forehead*, which he will acknowledge as his mark, and by which *he knows those that are his*.

(2.) To give to them who are thus marked an assurance of God's favour, that they may know it themselves; and the comfort of knowing it will be the most powerful support and cordial in calamitous times. Why should we perplex ourselves about this temporal life if we know by the mark that we have eternal life?

(3.) To be a direction to the destroyers whom to pass by, as the blood upon the door-posts was an indication that that was an Israelite's house, and the first-born there must not be slain. Note, Those who keep themselves pure in times of common iniquity God will keep safe in times of common calamity. Those that distinguish themselves shall be distinguished; those that cry for other men's sins shall not need to cry for their own afflictions, for they shall be either delivered from them or comforted under them. God

will set a mark upon his mourners, will book their sighs and bottle their tears. The *sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads* mentioned in ~~400~~ Revelation 7:3 was the same token of the care God has of his own people with this related here; only this was to secure them from being destroyed, that from being seduced, which is equivalent.

~~395~~ EZEKIEL 9:5-11

THE RIGHTEOUS DISTINGUISHED

In these verses we have,

I. A command given to the destroyers to do execution according to their commission. *They stood by the brazen altar*, waiting for orders; and orders are here given them to cut off and destroy all that were either guilty of, or accessory to, the abominations of Jerusalem, and that did not *sigh and cry* for them. Note, When God has *gathered his wheat into his garner* nothing remains but to *burn up the chaff*, ~~402~~ Matthew 3:12.

1. They are ordered to destroy all,

(1.) Without exception. They must *go through the city, and smite*; they must *slay utterly*, slay to destruction, give them their death's wound. They must make no distinction of age or sex, but cut off *old and young*; neither the beauty of the virgins, nor the innocency of the babes, shall secure them. This was fulfilled in the death of multitudes by famine and pestilence, especially by the sword of the Chaldeans, as far as the military execution went. Sometimes even such bloody work as this has been God's work. But what an evil thing is sin, then, which provokes the God of infinite mercy to such severity!

(2.) Without compassion: "*Let not your eye spare, neither have you pity* (v. 5); you must not save any whom God has doomed to destruction, as Saul did Agag and the Amalekites, for that is *doing the work of God deceitfully*, ~~2480~~ Jeremiah 48:10. None need to be more merciful than God is; and he had said (ch. 8:18), *My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity.*" Note, Those that live in sin, and hate to be reformed, will perish in sin, and deserve not to be pitied; for they might easily have prevented the ruin, and would not.

2. They are warned not to do the least hurt to those that were marked for salvation: “*Come not near any man upon whom is the mark; do not so much as threaten or frighten any of them; it is promised them that there shall no evil come nigh them, and therefore you must keep at a distance from them.*” The king of Babylon gave particular orders that Jeremiah should be protected. Baruch and Ebed-melech were secured, and, it is likely, others of Jeremiah's friends, for his sake. God had promised that *it should go well with his remnant and they should be well treated* (^{<2451>}Jeremiah 15:11); and we have reason to think that none of the mourning praying remnant fell by the sword of the Chaldeans, but that God found out some way or other to secure them all, as, in the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the Christians were all secured in a city called *Pella*, and none of them perished with the unbelieving Jews. Note, None of those shall be lost whom God has marked for life and salvation; for the foundation of God stands sure.

3. They are directed to *begin at the sanctuary* (v. 6), that sanctuary which, in the chapter before, he had seen the horrid profanation of; they must begin there because there the wickedness began which provoked God to send these judgments. The debaucheries of the priests were the poisoning of the springs, to which all the corruption of the streams was owing. The wickedness of the sanctuary was of all wickedness the most offensive to God, and therefore there the slaughter must begin: “*Begin there, to try if the people will take warning by the judgments of God upon their priests, and will repent and reform; begin there, that all the world may see and know that the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God, and hates sin most in those that are nearest to him.*” Note, When judgements are abroad they commonly *begin at the house of God*, ^{<4047>}1 Peter 4:17. *You only have I known, and therefore I will punish you*, ^{<3082>}Amos 3:2. God's temple is a sanctuary, a refuge and protection for penitent sinners, but not for any that *go on still in their trespasses*; neither the sacredness of the place nor the eminency of their place in it will be their security. It should seem the destroyers made some difficulty of putting men to death in the temple, but God bids them not to hesitate at that, but (v. 7), *Defile the house, and fill the courts with slain*. They will not be *taken from the altar* (as was appointed by the law, ^{<1214>}Exodus 21:14), but think to secure themselves by *keeping hold of the horns of it*, like Joab, and therefore, like him, let them *die there*, ^{<1023>}1 Kings 2:30, 31. There the blood of one of God's prophets had been shed (^{<1235>}Matthew 23:35) and therefore let their

blood be shed. Note, If the servants of God's house defile it with their idolatries, God will justly suffer the enemies of it to defile it with their violences, ^{<391>}Psalm 79:1. But these acts of necessary justice were really, whatever they were ceremonially, rather a purification than a pollution of the sanctuary; it was *putting away evil from among them*.

4. They are appointed to *go forth into the city*, v. 6, 7. Note, Wherever sin has gone before judgement will follow after; and, though *judgement begins at the house of God*, yet it shall not end there. The holy city shall be no more a protection to the wicked people then the holy house was to the wicked priests.

II. Here is execution done accordingly. They observed their orders, and,

1. *They began at the elders, the ancient men that were before the house*, and slew them first, either those seventy ancients who worshipped idols in their chambers (^{<382>}Ezekiel 8:12) or those twenty-five who *worshipped the sun between the porch and the altar*, who might more properly be said to be *before the house*. Note, Ringleaders in sin may expect to be first met with by the judgements of God; and the sins of those who are in the most eminent and public stations call for the most exemplary punishments.

2. They proceeded to the common people: *They went forth and slew in the city*; for, when the decree has gone forth, there shall be no delay; if God begin, he will make an end.

III. Here is the prophet's intercession for a mitigation of the judgement, and a reprieve for some (v. 8): *While they were slaying them, and I was left, I fell upon my face*. Observe here,

1. How sensible the prophet was of God's mercy to him, in that he was spared when so many round about him were cut off. *Thousands fell on his right hand, and on his left, and yet the destruction did not come nigh him; only with his eyes did he behold the just reward of the wicked*, ^{<390>}Psalm 91:7, 8. He speaks as one that narrowly escaped the destruction, attributing it to God's goodness, not his own deserts. Note, The best saints must acknowledge themselves indebted to sparing mercy that they are not consumed. And when desolating judgements are abroad, and multitudes fall by them, it ought to be accounted a great favor if we have our *lives given us for a prey*; for we might justly have perished with those that perished.

2. Observe how he improved this mercy; he looked upon it that *therefore* he was left that he might stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God. Note, We must look upon it that for this reason we are spared, that we may do good in our places, may do good by our prayers. Ezekiel did not triumph in the slaughter he made, but his *flesh trembled for the fear of God*, (as David's, ³⁸⁰Psalm 119:120); he *fell on his face, and cried*, not in fear for himself (he was one of those that were marked), but in compassion to his fellow-creatures. Those that sigh and cry for the sins of sinners cannot but sigh and cry for their miseries too; yet the day is coming when all this concern will be entirely swallowed up in a full satisfaction in this, that God is glorified; and those that now *fall on their faces, and cry, Ah! Lord God*, will lift up their heads, and sing, *Hallelujah*, ⁶⁹¹Revelation 19:1, 3. The prophet humbly expostulates with God: "*Wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel, and shall there be none left but the few that are marked? Shall the Israel of God be destroyed, utterly destroyed? When there are but a few left shall those be cut off, who might have been the seed of another generation? And will the God of Israel be himself their destroyer? Wilt thou now destroy Israel, who wast wont to protect and deliver Israel? Wilt thou so pour out thy fury upon Jerusalem as by the total destruction of the city to ruin the whole country too? Surely thou wilt not!*" Note, Though we acknowledge that *God is righteous*, yet we have leave to *plead with him concerning his judgements*, ²⁴⁰Jeremiah 12:1.

IV. Here is God's denial of the prophet's request for a mitigation of the judgement and his justification of himself in that denial, v. 9, 10.

1. Nothing could be said in extenuation of this sin. God was willing to show mercy as the prophet could desire; he always is so. But here the case will not admit of it; it is such that mercy cannot be granted without wrong to justice; and it is not fit that one attribute of God should be glorified at the expense of another. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that he should destroy, especially that he should destroy Israel? By no means. But the truth is their crimes are so flagrant that the reprieve of the sinners would be a connivance at the sin: "*The iniquity of the house of Judah and Israel is exceedingly great; there is no suffering them to go on at this rate. The land is filled with the innocent blood, and, when the city courts are appealed to for the defence of injured innocency, the remedy is as bad as the disease, for the city is full of perverseness, or wrestling of judgement; and that which they support themselves with in this iniquity is the same atheistical profane principle with which they flattered themselves in their*

idolatry, ²⁶⁸²Ezekiel 8:12. *The Lord has forsaken the earth*, and left it to us to do what we will in it; he will not intermeddle in the affairs of it; and, whatever wrong we do, he *sees not*; he either knows it not, or will not take cognizance of it.” Now how can those expect benefit by the mercy of God who thus bid defiance to his justice? No; nothing can be offered by an advocate in excuse of the crimes while the criminal puts in such a plea as this in his own vindication; and therefore.

2. Nothing can be done to mitigate the sentence (v. 10): “Whatever thou thinkest of it, *as for me, my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity*; I have borne with them as long as it was fit that such impudent sinners should be borne with; and therefore now *I will recompense their way on their head.*” Note, Sinners sink and perish under the weight of their own sins; it is their own way, which they deliberately chose rather than the way of God, and which they obstinately persisted in, in contempt of the word of God, that is *recompensed on* them. Great iniquities justify God in great severities; nay, he is ready to justify himself, as he does here to the prophet, for he will be *clear when he judges.*

V. Here is a return made of the writ of protection which was issued out for the securing of those that mourned in Zion (v. 11): *The man clothed with linen reported the matter*, gave an account of what he had done in pursuance of his commission; he had found out all that mourned in secret for the sins of the land, and cried out against them by a public testimony, and had marked them all in the forehead. Lord, *I have done as thou hast commanded me.* We do not find that those who were commissioned to destroy reported what destruction they had made, but he who was appointed to protect reported his matter; for it would be more pleasing both to God and to the prophet to hear of those that were saved than of those that perished. Or this report was made now because the thing was finished, whereas the destroying work would be a work of time, and when it was brought to an end then the report should be made. See how faithful Christ is to the trust reposed in him. Is he commanded to secure eternal life to the chosen remnant? He has done as was commanded him. *Of all that thou hast given me I have lost none.*