

Ezekiel's Sword

Ezekiel 5

Ezekiel 5:1-4: *“And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber’s razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair. ² You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them. ³ You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment. ⁴ Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel.”*

Background Notes

In Ezekiel 4-5, God told Ezekiel to act out four signs or object lessons for his fellow captives in Babylon. These signs predicted that Jerusalem, the city of God’s Temple, would fall to the Babylonians. Ezekiel and other Jews from Judah were already captives in Babylon at this time (592 BC), but Jerusalem had yet not fallen. Many of the people who were still in Jerusalem, as well as many of the captives, were convinced that Jerusalem would not be conquered. They were sure that God would never allow His Temple to be destroyed. But they were wrong! God was about to allow Jerusalem and the beautiful Temple built by King Solomon to be destroyed, as judgment for the idolatry and gross immorality of the people. They had gone too far. The city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army and the magnificent Temple was destroyed in 586 BC.

In sign number one, a siege was portrayed. Ezekiel inscribed a model of the city of Jerusalem on a clay brick or tablet and built siege ramps around it. In sign number two, the length of Israel’s sin and/or her punishment was signified by the number of days Ezekiel had to lie on his side overlooking his model city. In sign number three, the conditions of the famine that would come during the siege were predicted by the meager amount of food and water that Ezekiel was allowed to consume each day as he lay on his side beside his model city of Jerusalem.

A fourth sign was given in Ezekiel 5. In this sign, Ezekiel dramatized the results of the siege by shaving his head and dividing up his hair into thirds by weight. (So we know that Ezekiel was not bald, or he would have had a hard time giving this object lesson!) In those days, shaving your head was a sign of mourning and humiliation.

With the people as his audience, Ezekiel was told to burn one third of his hair in the center of his model city. Then he was to spread out another third of his hair around the model city and strike it with a sword. And then he was to take the final

third of his hair and scatter it to the wind. In addition, Ezekiel was to take a small amount of his hair and hide it in his robe - and then take some of that hair and burn it in the fire. What was the meaning of this unusual and detailed sign? The meaning was given in verses 5-17.

Doctrinal Points

1. Ezekiel predicted much death in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 5:5-17: *“Thus says the Lord God: ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her. ⁶ She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes.’ ⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you’— ⁸ therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. ⁹ And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. ¹⁰ Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds.*

¹¹ ‘Therefore, as I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. ¹² One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

¹³ ‘Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them. ¹⁴ Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that are all around you, in the sight of all who pass by.

¹⁵ ‘So it shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that are all around you, when I execute judgments among you in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken. ¹⁶ When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and cut off your supply of bread. ¹⁷ So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the Lord, have spoken.’”

In these verses, it's clear what God meant by the sign of Ezekiel shaving his head, and the treatment of his hair after it was divided into three parts.

Shaving his head pictured the separation between the Lord and His people. A man's hair and beard were closely linked to his body, so shaving the hair and beard represented broken fellowship. Jerusalem had been central to God's plans and close to God's heart. God planned for Israel to be a light to the other nations - but they turned away from the Lord and became even more wicked than the pagan nations. As a result, God had to separate Himself from His people. They would reap what they had sown (v11).

Furthermore, Ezekiel's shaved head and beard represented the defiled condition of the nation. According to the Law, priests were not to shave their heads or beards, and Ezekiel was a priest. In reference to priests, Leviticus 21:5 says: *"They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards."* So we can see why God used Ezekiel's shaved head and beard as a sign.

The three parts of divided hair represented the different categories of people who would die in the siege and fall of Jerusalem. Verse 12: *"One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them."*

There would be much death in Jerusalem as a result of the siege and defeat of Judah. Even the few who escaped at first (represented by the small amount of hair hidden in Ezekiel's robe) would face death later. Many of the survivors died in Egypt, where they tried to escape after Jerusalem fell. All these predictions came true when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC. Ezekiel predicted much death in Jerusalem.

2. Ezekiel predicted horrible death in Jerusalem.

Verses 9-10: *"And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds."*

During the long siege of Jerusalem, this horrible prediction literally came true. Cannibalism took place in the starving city. A sad record of the ghastly conditions in Jerusalem is recorded in the book of Lamentations. *"The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them in the destruction of the daughter of my people"* (Lamentations 4:10).

In His Law, God had predicted that if Israel turned away from Him, one of the results of their sin would be cannibalism (Deuteronomy 28:49-53). This prediction was fulfilled when Babylon besieged and conquered Jerusalem.

In verse 17, Ezekiel predicted further horrible death as a result of Israel's disobedience: *"So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the Lord, have spoken."*

This was also predicted in the Law (Leviticus 26:21-25). It was divine judgment for the nation of Israel's disobedience and rebellion against God. Ezekiel predicted that horrible death would take place in Jerusalem.

Practical Application

Don't forget that "God is holy" as well as "God is love."

The Bible certainly teaches that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). But some people wonder how the Bible can tell us that God is love, when the Bible also includes passages like Ezekiel 5:13-15? The answer to that question is: **God is a holy God, as well as a God of love.**

Has anyone ever questioned you about God's love, because of His actions of judgment and wrath? If so, how did you answer that person? The answer is that **God is holy, as well as God is love.** Because God is holy and just, He must judge sin. He cannot simply sweep sin under the rug and forget about it. His anger and wrath are directed at rebellion and sin. What would we think of loving parents who did not discipline their children, but just let them continually get away with all kinds of wrongdoing and rebellious acts?

Fortunately for us, because of His great love, God provided a way for sinners to escape His wrath against our sin. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross as our substitute, the wrath of God against sin was poured out upon Jesus Christ. Because He took the penalty for sin in our place, the price has been paid. Salvation is now offered freely - as the gift of a loving God!

When we're given a gift, we must accept and receive the gift before it becomes our property. In the same way, the gift of salvation must be personally **received** by each one of us, in order for it to become effective for us. If that gift is not received, the wrath of God is not removed from us. Why? Because God is a holy God. John 3:36 says, "*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him.*" I trust that none of you are still "abiding under the wrath of God."

Don't forget that "God is holy" as well as "God is love"!