

# Ezekiel 5: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ] Ezekiel chapter 5 Thus says the Lord God, This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the centre of the nations, with countries all around her.

And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness, more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her. For they have rejected my rules, and have not walked in my statutes.

Therefore thus says the Lord God, Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.

And because of all your abominations, I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers.

And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds. Therefore as I live, declares the Lord God, Surely because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things, and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw, my eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.

[ 1 : 59 ] A third part of you shall die of pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst. A third part shall fall by the sword all around you, and a third part I will scatter to all the winds, and will unsheathe the sword after them.

Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them, and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord, that I have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury upon them. Moreover, I will make you a desolation, and an object of reproach among the nations all around you, and in the sight of all who pass by. You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to all the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes.

I am the Lord, I have spoken. When I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you, and break your supply of bread, I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children.

Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord, I have spoken. Ezekiel chapter 5 continues the multi-stage sign act that the Lord instructed the prophet to perform in chapter 4.

[ 3 : 20 ] In chapter 4 he enacted the siege of Jerusalem, and in chapter 5 Ezekiel enacts the judgment and scattering of the people that will follow it. He is instructed to take a sharp sword, and to use it to shave the hair off his head and his beard.

Isaiah had spoken of such an act as a symbol of judgment by a foreign army, back in Isaiah chapter 7 verse 20. In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the river, with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.

Perhaps those watching Ezekiel may have recognized an allusion to Isaiah's words in his action. Ezekiel's shaving of his head and beard would have been a humiliating symbol of mourning and disgrace.

It was something that priests serving the Lord were not supposed to do, as we see in Leviticus chapter 21 verse 5. They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body.

Later in describing the priests in the renewed temple, Ezekiel himself will write in chapter 44 verse 20 of his prophecy, They shall not shave their heads, or let their locks grow long.

[ 4 : 29 ] They shall surely trim the hair of their heads. Here the shaving of the head seems to represent a forceful humiliation of the people of the land by an invading enemy, a stripping of the glory of the nation.

Hair is also a symbol of a multitude and of growth, as Marsha Greenberg observes. Having been shaved, he was instructed to weigh the hair, something which Absalom was said to have done back in 2 Samuel chapter 14 verse 26, for rather different reasons.

Ezekiel would then divide the hair into three separate parts, one part he would burn up in the midst of the city, presumably the engraved image of Jerusalem that he had made on the brick.

This seemingly was performed at the end of the 390 days. The second third of the hair was scattered around the city, where it was struck with the sword. The final third of the hair was scattered to the wind, so that it would be blown away and presumably lost.

However, of this final third of the hair, Ezekiel was instructed to retain a small amount, which he was to bind to the folds of his garment for preservation. The word for binding here is related to the word used for besieging at the beginning of the sign act in chapter 4 verse 3, as Bloch observes, While the third in the city and the third around the city would be utterly destroyed, of the third that made it into exile, a small remnant would be graciously preserved by the Lord.

[ 5 : 52 ] Ezekiel, within his sign act, is playing both the part of the people at some points and the part of the Lord at others. However, the preservation of the small remnant of the third to be scattered to the wind was also attended by a warning against complacency.

Even some of the hair that had been preserved was to be burned. The people would not be saved from the Lord's judgment in the land of exile, but it would follow some of them and destroy them there. We have a similar image in Zechariah chapter 13 verses 8 to 9.

In the whole land declares the Lord, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.

In verses 5 to 17 of this chapter, the Lord speaks in association with the sign act. If any of the spectators were uncertain about the meaning of the engraved brick, for instance, the Lord's announcement through Ezekiel made clear its meaning.

It was a representation of Jerusalem. Jerusalem had enjoyed a blessed and privileged status, Israel having been set apart from all of the other nations, with the Lord dwelling in their midst.

[ 6 : 59 ] However, in their privilege, they had sinned more grievously and egregiously than any of the other nations, who did not know the Lord. The people of Israel had not only failed to observe the commandments of the Lord, they had not even lived up to the standards of the pagan nations around them.

Consequently, the Lord's face was set against them. They were barred from his presence, much as the iron griddle of Ezekiel had divided him from the model city. As a result of their sin, they would suffer the grimmest of fates.

In Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 52 to 55, the gruesome results of the siege that the Lord would bring upon Israel on account of its apostasy are described. They shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land.

And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the Lord your God has given you. And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you.

The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you in all your towns.

[ 8 : 24 ] On account of their idolatries and abominations, the Lord would bring Israel to the point where they would cannibalise their own children in the most horrific manner. Parents eating their own children is described as a result of the siege of Samaria in 2 Kings chapter 6, and of the final siege of Jerusalem in Lamentations chapter 2 verse 20.

Survivors would be uprooted and scattered. The judgment of the Lord that would fall upon the people of Israel would utterly devastate them, on account of their persistent idolatry and the defiling of the Lord's sanctuary with their sin and their service of false gods.

The threefold punishment of sword, famine, and pestilence, or the fourfold punishment of sword, famine, pestilence, and exile are mentioned on several occasions in the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah chapter 15 verses 2 to 4.

And when they ask you, Where shall we go? You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, Those who are for pestilence to pestilence, and those who are for the sword to the sword, those who are for famine to famine, and those who are for captivity to captivity.

I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, declares the Lord, the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

[ 9 : 38 ] And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem. The description of the fate awaiting the people of Israel here is also familiar from the curses of the covenant.

They will become a byword among the nations, the awful nature of their judgment getting the attention of the surrounding peoples. A question to consider.

Throughout his prophecies to this point, Ezekiel has been restricted, humiliated, and charged to defile himself. He has been struck dumb. The Lord has rendered him immobile. He has eaten starvation rations and food cooked over defiling dung.

He has also had all of his hair shaven off in a way that serving priests were not supposed to. How would this have shaped Ezekiel and the people's senses of the meaning of his sign acts?

