

Ezekiel 5

- I mentioned last week that we've entered an extended section of the book running from chapters 4-24
 - In that section, the Lord tells Ezekiel to issue warning after warning to Israel about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Judah
 - Last week I explained how that judgment took place at the hands of the Babylonians
 - So already we have the big picture of the history of this event
 - But if you scan through the upcoming chapters, you'll notice the theme doesn't change much
 - The Lord continues to hammer away at what Israel has done to offend Him and He describes the severe consequences coming
 - At times He will use some very colorful and even vulgar terms to describe Israel's sin
 - But in general, the message remains on the same theme
 - So anyone who attempts to preach through this book on a weekly basis is faced with a challenge of keeping the message fresh each week
 - Ezekiel is one of the least often taught books of the Bible in the church, probably for this reason
 - Most pastors are reluctant to make their congregations listen to God pronouncing judgment against His people week after week
 - Fortunately for you, I'm not that sensitive
- Nevertheless, I recognize I need to consider ways to bring something new each week, and here's how I intend to do that
 - Each of the next 20 chapters reveals some aspect of the coming destruction of Jerusalem
 - Some chapters describe the sins of the people that brought God's wrath
 - Some chapters explain the coming judgments God will send against the people and the city

- Other chapters reveal the departure of God's glory from the temple or the silencing of false prophets or the removal of idols
- There are even chapters where the Lord promises to bring the nation a heart of faith and return them into the land
- So we're going to focus on each chapter's distinct perspective
 - We'll read every word
 - But when a chapter repeats themes or concepts we've already studied, we'll spend our time on examining other aspects
- For the next three chapters beginning with chapter 5 today, we study the consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem
 - Each chapter gives us a different perspective
 - Chapter 5 looks at the effect of God's judgment on the people
 - Chapter 6 covers the effect of God's judgment upon the land
 - And chapter 7 covers the effect of God's judgment on Israel's prosperity
- These three perspectives parallel the promises God gave to Abraham
 - The Lord promised Abraham he would have a people, a land and the blessing of an inheritance in the land
 - These promises are unconditional, and God will remain faithful to Israel in all three areas
 - But as Paul says in Romans, not all Israel who are descended from Israel
 - So those within Israel who ultimately receive these promises are those who share in the faith of Abraham
- So let's move on to chapter 5 and the consequences of God's judgment against the people of the city, beginning with the final sign of Ezekiel's charade

Ezek. 5:1 "As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it as a barber's razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair.

Ezek. 5:2 "One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike it with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

Ezek. 5:3 "Take also a few in number from them and bind them in the edges of your robes.

Ezek. 5:4 “Take again some of them and throw them into the fire and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel.

- Last week God asked Ezekiel to make a miniature model of the siege of Jerusalem and to lie on his side next to the model for 430 days
 - These actions were to be signs to Israel of what was coming against the city
 - The city would be sieged and taken
 - And the people would be barred from free access to their city and temple for 430 years
 - Now we come to the third part of the charade, where Ezekiel will dramatize the effects of that siege upon the people
 - Ezekiel is required to shave his head and beard completely
 - The Law of God prohibited a man from shaving his head and beard under certain circumstances
 - In particular, a priest could not serve before the Lord with the sacrifices if he had shaved his head
 - So now the Lord orders Ezekiel to shave himself, which would have disqualified Ezekiel from serving in the temple
 - But there was no temple in Babylon and Ezekiel wasn't serving as a priest
 - So in this case the Lord's instructions resulted in Ezekiel's humiliation and shame before the people
 - And this is part of the charade
 - Ezekiel is playing the part of Israel again
- More specifically, Ezekiel's hair is playing the part of Israel
 - The Lord tells Ezekiel to divide his hair three ways by weighing it on a scale
 - To weigh on a scale is a picture of God's judgment, so the hair is experiencing a judgment of sorts

- And the precision of the measurement emphasizes the discriminating nature of God's judgment
- God is assigning outcomes to various groups in precise ways
- Jerusalem's population will be divided into thirds, and each third will experience a different fate
 - One third will die in the siege on the city as represented by the hair burned in the fire of the city following the siege
 - Another third will die by the sword of the Babylonians as they flee the city
 - And the final third of Ezekiel's hair was to be scattered to the wind, symbolizing the scattering of Israel among the Gentile nations of the world
 - These refugees will be driven away from Israel and into the world at the point of a sword
- From the perspective of the people suffering these judgments, everything will appear random and without meaning
 - They will see their city and lives destroyed
 - They will watch as their family and countrymen will die around them while others are left captive away from Judah
 - But the Lord is telling them now what's going to happen so they will understand that it's not random
 - It's a plan of God executed as judgment against an unbelieving and ungodly people
- But this isn't to be the end of Israel
 - Notice in v.3 that the Lord commands Ezekiel to separate a few hairs out of the three groups and set them aside
 - These few will be bound in the edges or hem of Ezekiel's robe
 - The edge of man's robe symbolized his character and authority
 - So by binding the hairs in his robe, Ezekiel is indicating that these few hairs share in Ezekiel's faithfulness

- Those hairs represent the remnant of Israel
 - The remnant is an important concept in Scripture
 - The Bible tells us that though Israel is very numerous, only a small group of Jews are truly believing in God
 - This small group is the true Israel
 - We might call this group those who are “saved” in Israel, but the Bible calls them the remnant

Is. 10:20 Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

Is. 10:21 A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

Is. 10:22 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea,
Only a remnant within them will return;...

- The Lord is telling the people that in the midst of this destruction He will preserve His remnant, those believers within Israel
 - But notice they are not spared from the judgment entirely
 - After all, Ezekiel is a part of that remnant, which is why the hairs were bound into his hem signifying they are like him
 - So they are righteous like Ezekiel, but yet they will go in exile like Ezekiel too
 - So the Lord’s promise to preserve the remnant wasn’t a promise to preserve them from the judgments
 - It was a promise to preserve them through the judgments
 - Remember, these judgments are required by the Old Covenant
 - The Old Covenant binds the entire nation to a single fate
 - All the nation is blessed or all receive judgment
 - So on earth, the nation rises or falls together
 - But the Old Covenant has nothing to do with salvation
 - Salvation is by faith alone in the promises of God

- The Abrahamic Covenant established that there would always be a people among Israel who shared in the faith of Abraham
- And because they share in the faith of Abraham, so would they share in the future of Abraham

Rom. 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Rom. 4:16 For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

- So no matter what calamity befell Israel for their failure to keep the Old Covenant, nevertheless the remnant still had assurance of eternal life
 - God not only preserved them through the judgments He brought against the nation
 - But God will also fulfilled His promises to them in the Kingdom
- But then notice in v.4 that Ezekiel is told to burn some of those remnant hairs in fire
 - When the Babylonians came to capture the city, some of the remnant were not interested in going into exile
 - They did not accept the word of the prophet Jeremiah when he told them that God appointed this scattering and they must go
 - Instead, a few believing Jews fought back and killed a Babylonian governor
 - Then they became afraid of what the Babylonians would do to them, so these rebellious believers decided to escape to Egypt
 - But we know from Ezekiel that the Lord has determined His people will go to Babylon
 - So the Lord issues a warning to the rebellious members of the remnant through a word from the prophet Jeremiah

Jer. 42:1 Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshai, and all the people both small and great approached

Jer. 42:2 and said to Jeremiah the prophet, “Please let our petition come before you, and pray for us to the Lord your God, that is for all this remnant; because we are left but a few out of many, as your own eyes now see us,

Jer. 42:3 that the Lord your God may tell us the way in which we should walk and the thing that we should do.”

Jer. 42:4 Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, “I have heard you. Behold, I am going to pray to the Lord your God in accordance with your words; and I will tell you the whole message which the Lord will answer you. I will not keep back a word from you.”

- o So Jeremiah prays and then gives them the Lord’s answer

Jer. 42:11 ‘Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you are now fearing; do not be afraid of him,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand.

Jer. 42:12 ‘I will also show you compassion, so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your own soil.

Jer. 42:13 ‘But if you are going to say, “We will not stay in this land,” so as not to listen to the voice of the Lord your God,

Jer. 42:14 saying, “No, but we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of a trumpet or hunger for bread, and we will stay there”;

Jer. 42:15 then in that case listen to the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “If you really set your mind to enter Egypt and go in to reside there,

Jer. 42:16 then the sword, which you are afraid of, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are anxious, will follow closely after you there in Egypt, and you will die there.

Jer. 42:17 “So all the men who set their mind to go to Egypt to reside there will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or refugees from the calamity that I am going to bring on them.””

- o The men were so disturbed by what Jeremiah told them that they claimed he was lying and they decided to go to Egypt anyway
 - They were determined to disobey the Lord’s instructions
 - And to punish Jeremiah, they kidnapping the prophet and forced him to go to Egypt with them
 - Jeremiah eventually lived out his remaining years in Egypt

- Ezekiel tells us that the Lord will judge these rebellious believers for disobedience
 - That judgment fire is the same one that engulfs all the people of Israel
 - It didn't matter if they hid in the city or in the hills or fled to Egypt, they would see judgment
 - You can run, but you can't hide from the Lord
 - This reminds us God's remnant, believers, may face consequences for disobedience
 - We see two principles working together in this example
 - First, God's people may experience bad things because God is working around us on things that are much bigger than us
 - But still the Lord hasn't forgotten about His remnant, and He will preserve us through these trials
 - Remember the Lord said through Jeremiah that if the remnant went into captivity obediently, the Lord would to preserve them there
 - While they were in Babylon, He would care for them
 - And eventually, He promises to bring the remnant back
 - That leads to the second principle: believers must remain obedient to the Lord even when His commands don't suit our preferences
 - When the remnant didn't respond obediently to the word of the Lord, they experienced judgment like the unbelievers
 - They were judged in earthly sense, though their eternal life remained secure
 - And if we fail to obey the Lord in the midst of a trial, then we lose the privilege of preservation
 - Our eternal security is never in jeopardy, because it doesn't turn on our works one way or the other
 - But our earthly blessings including long life may turn on our obedience
- Now Ezekiel has finished the charade, so it's finally time to speak to the people

Ezek. 5:5 “Thus says the Lord God, ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her.

Ezek. 5:6 ‘But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes.’

Ezek. 5:7 “Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you and have not walked in My statutes, nor observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,’

Ezek. 5:8 therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.

Ezek. 5:9 ‘And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.

Ezek. 5:10 ‘Therefore, fathers will eat their sons among you, and sons will eat their fathers; for I will execute judgments on you and scatter all your remnant to every wind.

Ezek. 5:11 ‘So as I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare.

Ezek. 5:12 ‘One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

Ezek. 5:13 ‘Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased; then they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My wrath upon them.

Ezek. 5:14 ‘Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by.

Ezek. 5:15 ‘So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath and raging rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Ezek. 5:16 ‘When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I will send to destroy you, then I will also intensify the famine upon you and break the staff of bread.

Ezek. 5:17 ‘Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword on you. I, the Lord, have spoken.’”

- Finally the Lord speak to Israel through Ezekiel, and in the word Ezekiel shares, the Lord declares four points
 - First, He reminds Israel of the privilege God gave them
 - In v.5 He says they are set in the center of the nations of the earth

- Remember, Israel was not a nation before God made it
- He created a people out of one man and his barren wife
- And then He grew that people to the point they could conquer the land and establish a nation in His name
- They were assigned a place at the center of the earth, a place where east and west crossed, where all the nations of the world would take notice
 - That reflected the Lord's desire for Israel to be a light among the nations
 - Israel was supposed to witness to the Living God and His Law by keeping His statutes and ordinances before pagan nations
 - And in return, the Lord would protect and bless Israel
- That leads us to the second point in v.6: Israel's unfaithfulness
 - Israel was unfaithful to the Old Covenant and not just a little unfaithful
 - Ironically, Israel adopted practices even more wicked than those practiced by the ignorant nations that surrounded her
 - In v.7 the Lord observes that though Israel had God's law, they were even more evil than the pagan nations that didn't know the law
 - Instead of being a source of light to the world, Israel became a black hole
- Which leads to the third point...in v.8 God declares judgment against them
 - Because they were more wicked than the other nations, the Lord will bring them a calamity greater than He brought any other nation
 - He says in v.10 that the nation will see fathers consuming their children or sons consuming their elderly parents
 - As terrible as this sounds, it's an accurate description of what we know happened inside the city as I mentioned a week ago
- Lamentations describes the scene this way

Lam. 4:9 Better are those slain with the sword
 Than those slain with hunger;
 For they pine away, being stricken
 For lack of the fruits of the field.

Lam. 4:10 The hands of compassionate women
 Boiled their own children;
 They became food for them
 Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Lam. 4:11 The Lord has accomplished His wrath,
 He has poured out His fierce anger;
 And He has kindled a fire in Zion
 Which has consumed its foundations.

- The Lord's fourth point is found in vs.12-17, the consequences
 - As we learned in the charade, the nation would be split into thirds
 - Some dying of famine, some of sword and the rest scattered
 - The Lord would have no pity on His people, because their sins were so great
 - The story of Judah's downfall would be one calamity after another
 - Notice in the concluding verses of the chapter the Lord speaks of wild beasts taking children, of more famine, more bloodshed
 - The destruction of Jerusalem and her people would be the worst disaster any nation had ever seen or will ever see
 - Moreover, the Lord says in v. 9 that He would never repeat this episode again
 - Other disasters would come and will come for Israel
 - But never again would Israel experience something like this
- Privilege, unfaithfulness, judgment and consequences
 - Israel was privileged by God but responded with unfaithfulness which led God to bring judgment with terrible consequences
 - Has God been fair to Israel through all this?
 - Well, let's consider this pattern again

- God gave His people a privileged place to serve in the world, but He also gave them everything they needed to succeed
 - He blessed them with a land that was bountiful and beautiful
 - He sent them teachers and inspiring examples like Joshua, Samuel, and David
 - He gave them judges (and kings when they demanded one) to guide them in the right way
 - He even made provision in the Law for sacrifices to cover their sins and maintain the covenant blessings
 - So who do you blame?
- And even when they demonstrated unfaithfulness, the Lord still gave them plenty of second chances
 - He gave them priests to intercede for them with sacrifices
 - He sent them prophets to correct them
 - He still gave them rain in the proper season and abundant crops
 - He even gave them victory over Israel's enemies even as they were adopting their pagan practices
 - So who do you blame?
- Eventually, the Lord had to bring judgment, but only after showing long-suffering mercy by His patience
 - He waited patiently for centuries before acting against them
 - Entire generations of evil came and went without God acting
 - At times He acted to discipline them, but when the people cried out, He would hear them and restore them
 - This pattern happened time and time again
 - So who do you blame?
- Finally, despite the severity of the consequences, the Lord continued to show mercy to His people even after the judgment
 - He cared for the physical need in exile

- And while in exile He continued to speak to them by His prophet
- And after their exile, the Lord brought Israel back to her land
- So who is to blame?
- And before you judge, remember the Lord also preserved a remnant of faithful, believing Israel even in the midst of their apostasy
 - The Lord preserved His saints through the judgment
 - And more than them, the Lord also rescued a third of unbelieving Israel
 - Peter tells us this is the Lord's pattern

2Pet. 2:6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter;

2Pet. 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men

2Pet. 2:8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),

2Pet. 2:9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

- The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah engaged in great depravity
 - So the Lord set out to make an example of these city
 - Peter says the example was for those who would live ungodly lives thereafter
 - If you want to do what these cities did, then you should understand what lies in store for you
 - But then there was the problem of Lot
 - Lot was a righteous man by faith
 - Today we would say he was saved
 - But foolishly, Lot chose to live in the cesspool of Sodom
 - So then what will become of him when the Lord brings judgment?
 - Since we know these cities were to be an example for the world, it mattered what happened to Lot

- If Lot were destroyed in this moment, then it would suggest to the world that God's judgment is capricious and indiscriminate
- That He doesn't care about the righteous anymore than the unrighteous
- And that's not the message the Lord wanted to send
- So the Lord made a way to remove righteous Lot along with a few members of His family
 - Now we have an accurate picture of how the Lord judges
 - The unrighteous and their city were destroyed
 - While the righteous were rescued from judgment
 - And a few unrighteous were also preserved from temporal judgment because of their association with the righteous
- So it is during Israel's exile
 - A third of the people have been preserved because the Lord is gracious
 - Among that third are the remnant, the righteous
- So if you're tempted to judge the Lord for His actions, keep the big picture in mind
 - These people pushed the boundaries of God's patience and mercy beyond any reasonable limit
 - They rejected the Lord and His word and failed to teach their children about the God Who brought them up as a people
 - They killed the prophets God sent to them
 - They committed abominations in the temple calling it worship
 - They did detestable things to their own children in praise to pagan idols
 - And so now that God is judging them, He's simply letting the consequences of their sins rest upon their heads
 - They stored up wrath for themselves over generations
 - And now God has simply poured it out

- The record of God's relationship with Israel is more accurately described as a patient and long-suffering God tolerating an evil, stubborn people
 - We ought to consider this example for our own sake
 - We are not Israel so we are not party to the Old Covenant
 - We are not bound by its terms and we do not need to fear its consequences
- But as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, we have entered into a much better covenant and so the stakes are higher

Heb. 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb. 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

Heb. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Heb. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people."

Heb. 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- We are His people, and like the remnant in Israel, our eternal security is never in doubt
 - But also like them, we must still concern ourselves with our testimony of obedience while on earth
 - And if we are determined to ignore His will, we will know the consequences of disobedience
 - But if we are willing to rest in His care and His counsel, then we will may preserved through the trials of life until the day He calls us home