

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 10-Chapter Five (Ezekiel 4:1-17)

Executive Summary

The core message emphasizes that Jerusalem’s rebellion against divine ordinances was uniquely egregious—surpassing even that of the surrounding pagan nations. Consequently, the judgment described is of an unprecedented nature, involving horrific conditions such as famine-induced cannibalism and total desolation. This briefing document synthesizes the psychological impact of Ezekiel’s actions, the specific charges leveled against Israel, and the linguistic nuances of the Hebrew text used to describe the divine wrath.

I. The Prophetic Context

Ezekiel, serving as a priest among the exiles, was commanded by God to perform three demonstrative prophecies to inform the nation of the coming siege of Jerusalem and its subsequent impact.

- **First Prophecy:** Focused on the certainty of the coming siege and invasion of Israel and Judah.
- **Second Prophecy:** Focused on the severe famine that would impact those living within the besieged areas.
- **Third Prophecy (Chapter 5):** Focused on the specific fates of the population and the total scattering of the remnant.

II. The Symbolic Act: The Shaving of the Priest

In Ezekiel 5:1, the prophet is commanded to take a sharp sword and use it as a barber’s razor on his head and beard. This act held profound psychological and legal significance.

Violation of Priestly Law

According to **Leviticus 21:5-6**, priests were strictly forbidden from shaving their heads or the edges of their beards:

"They shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards... They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God."

The Psychological Impact

Because the exiles knew Ezekiel was a priest who traditionally upheld the Law of Moses (having previously petitioned God regarding dietary laws to avoid defilement), his public violation of these standards was intended to:

- Horrify the exiles.
- Command immediate and shocked attention.
- Underscore the "profane" and desperate state of the nation.

III. The Division of the Hair: Three Fates

Ezekiel was commanded to use scales to weigh and divide his hair into three equal parts, symbolizing the specific judgments to be executed at the end of the siege.

The Distribution of Judgment

Proportion	Symbolic Action	Literal Meaning (Ezekiel 5:12)
One-Third	Burned in the fire at the center of the city.	Death by plague or consumption by famine within the city.
One-Third	Struck with a sword all around the city.	Falling by the sword during the invasion.
One-Third	Scattered to the wind.	Forced scattering and exile, pursued by an unsheathed sword.

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The Remnant

Ezekiel was instructed to take a "few in number" from the third scattered to the wind and bind them in the edges of his robes. However, even from this small remnant, some were to be thrown into the fire, signifying a fire that would spread to "all the house of Israel."

IV. Divine Indictment: The Rebellion of Jerusalem

The text establishes Jerusalem's unique position and its failure to uphold its purpose.

Jerusalem at the Center

God declares, *"This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations."*

- **Hebrew term *tāveḵ*:** Occurs 118 times in Ezekiel; it suggests being "in the midst" or "among."
- **Significance:** Israel was established as a nation among other nations by God Himself.

The Charges

The LORD levels specific charges against Israel for surpassing the wickedness of the surrounding "heathen" nations (*gôy*):

1. **Rejection of Statutes:** Israel actively rejected the Law of Moses.
2. **Unparalleled Turmoil (*hāmôn*):** The source notes that Israel's "turmoil" or "multitude" can be understood as "chaos" resulting from their rebellion.
3. **Worse than Pagans:** Israel is charged with not even observing the basic ordinances of the surrounding idolatrous nations; they "excelled" in rebellion.

V. The Execution of Judgment

Because Israel defiled the sanctuary with "detestable idols" and "abominations," God declared He would execute judgment in the sight of all nations without pity or sparing.

Horrific Consequences

- **Cannibalism:** Ezekiel 5:10 predicts that due to the severity of the siege, fathers would eat their sons and sons would eat their fathers.
- **Desolation and Reproach:** Jerusalem would become an "object of horror," a "reviling," and a "warning" to surrounding lands.
- **The Four-Fold Scourge:** God promises to send famine ("deadly arrows of famine"), wild beasts, plague/bloodshed, and the sword.

The Nature of "Wild Beasts"

The Hebrew phrase *ra'/'khah'ee* is used here.

- This does not refer to literal animals (which would be *sawdeh khah'ee* or "beasts of the field").
- It describes the **disposition** of the invaders. The enemies would act with "extreme cruelty and brutality," behaving with pure instinct and no mercy, effectively acting as "animalistic" humans.

VI. Divine Motivation: Zeal and Wrath

The document addresses the question of why a compassionate God would speak and act with such severity.

- **Satisfying Wrath (*nûah*):** This word implies "rest." God intended to exhaust His anger until it "rested" or was spent.
- **Being Appeased (*nāham*):** This is translated as "comforted." It suggests a reflexive action where God is comforted by the execution of justice against rebellion.

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- **Knowledge of the LORD:** The ultimate goal of this destruction was that the survivors would "know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal."

VII. Conclusion of the Prophecy

The chapter concludes with the phrase, "*I, the LORD, have spoken.*" This underscores the absolute certainty of the message. The judgment was not an arbitrary act of cruelty but a necessary consequence of a "stubborn and obstinate" people who had transgressed against God "to this very day."