

Ezekiel 5:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair.

Analysis

And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair. Ezekiel receives another shocking prophetic command—to shave his head and beard with a sword (cherev chaddah, חֶרֶב חֲדָדָה, "sharp sword") functioning as a barber's razor. For an Israelite priest, this act violated sacred norms. Levitical law prohibited priests from shaving their heads or beards (Leviticus 21:5), as such disfigurement was associated with pagan mourning rituals and ritual defilement.

The "sharp knife" or "sword" symbolizes violent judgment—not gentle trimming but forcible removal. Using military weaponry for personal grooming creates jarring imagery: warfare invades the most intimate personal spaces. The "balances to weigh" (moznei mishqal, מֹזְנֵי מִשְׁקָל) introduce meticulous division, emphasizing God's precise, measured judgment. Nothing is random; everything is carefully apportioned according to divine justice.

The shaving of head and beard represents utter humiliation and loss of dignity (2 Samuel 10:4-5; Isaiah 7:20). In ancient Near Eastern culture, beards signified manhood, wisdom, and honor. Forcing a priest to violate these marks through self-inflicted shaving dramatizes the comprehensive shame and degradation exile would bring. Theologically, this points toward Christ who endured ultimate

humiliation (Isaiah 50:6; 53:3) bearing our shame so we might receive His honor (Hebrews 12:2).

Historical Context

Hair held deep cultural significance in ancient Israel. Long, well-groomed beards indicated dignity and maturity. Forcing someone to shave represented profound disgrace—Hanun's humiliation of David's ambassadors by shaving half their beards was grounds for war (2 Samuel 10:4-5). For priests, whose appearance symbolized holiness and consecration to God, shaving violated sacred duty.

Ezekiel's public performance of this degrading act before the exile community would shock and disturb. The priest, who should exemplify holiness and dignity, becomes object of pity and horror. This visceral demonstration communicated what words alone couldn't: Jerusalem's coming judgment would strip away every vestige of dignity, honor, and sacred status.

The use of a sword rather than normal shaving implements foreshadows violence. Within a decade, Babylonian swords would indeed 'shave' Jerusalem—stripping the city of inhabitants, wealth, and glory. The prophetic drama enacted in Ezekiel's body would become historical reality in the nation's experience.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Ezekiel's violation of priestly norms to deliver God's message teach about the cost of faithful prophetic ministry?
2. What does the imagery of using a sword as a razor reveal about judgment's violent, invasive nature?

3. In what ways does Christ's bearing of ultimate shame enable believers to stand before God with dignity?

Interlinear Text

וְאַתָּה הַ	בֶּן	אִדָּם	וְלָקַחְתָּ	לֵב	חֶרֶב	חֶדֶד הַ
H859	And thou son	of man	take	H0	knife	thee a sharp
	H1121	H120	H3947		H2719	H2299
תֵּרַר	הַגִּלְבִּים	וְלָקַחְתָּ	לָהּ	וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ		עַל
razor	thee a barber's	take	H0	and cause it to pass		H5921
H8593	H1532	H3947		H5674		
רֹאשְׁךָ	וְעַל	זָקֶנְךָ	וְלָקַחְתָּ	לָהּ	מֵאֲזֵנָי	
upon thine head	H5921	and upon thy beard	take	H0	thee balances	
H7218		H2206	H3947		H3976	
וְחִלְקֶתָם:	מִשְׁקָל ל					
and divide	to weigh					
H2505	H4948					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 7:20 (Parallel theme): In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard.

Ezekiel 44:20 (Parallel theme): Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads.

Leviticus 21:5 (Parallel theme): They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

Daniel 5:27 (Parallel theme): TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

