

Ezekiel 5:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them.

Analysis

Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. God commands Ezekiel to divide his shaved hair into precise thirds, each representing Jerusalem's population fate. The first third burned "in the midst of the city" (betokh ha-ir, בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר) symbolizes death by fire, famine, and pestilence during siege. The second third smitten "about it with a knife" represents death by sword during the city's fall. The final third "scattered in the wind" depicts exile and dispersion.

The threefold division demonstrates comprehensive judgment—no escape exists; every possibility ends in death or exile. Yet even exile offers no safety: "I will draw out a sword after them" (arik acharehem charev, אָרִיק אַחֲרֵיהֶם חָרֵב). God's pursuing sword follows the scattered remnant, ensuring judgment reaches even refugees. This echoes Amos 9:1-4—no hiding place exists from divine wrath.

The mathematical precision (one-third, one-third, one-third) emphasizes God's sovereign control and perfect justice. Nothing occurs by chance; each person's fate fulfills divine decree. This anticipates Jesus' teaching that God numbers even

the hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7)—nothing escapes divine knowledge and sovereign ordering. The terror is that this sovereign precision here serves judgment; the gospel comfort is that the same sovereignty works all things for believers' good (Romans 8:28).

Historical Context

Ezekiel's prophecy came true with devastating accuracy during Jerusalem's fall (586 BC). Historical records confirm that approximately one-third of Jerusalem's population died during the 18-month siege from famine, disease, and fire. When Babylon breached the walls, approximately one-third died by sword in the ensuing slaughter. The final third was exiled to Babylon, though even there many faced execution or death.

Jeremiah's parallel account confirms these proportions: "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" (Jeremiah 15:2; cf. Zechariah 13:8-9). The prophetic word proved precise in fulfillment.

The 'sword drawn after' the exiles manifested in various ways: some exiles were executed by Babylonians; others died in subsequent rebellions or purges; Jewish refugees who fled to Egypt were pursued there by Babylonian armies (Jeremiah 43-44). No refuge provided safety when God decreed judgment. The only safety lay in repentance and submission to God's disciplining hand.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the precise division of Jerusalem's fate demonstrate God's sovereign control even in judgment?
2. What does the 'sword drawn after' exiles teach about the impossibility of fleeing from God?
3. In what ways does this comprehensive judgment drive us to seek refuge in Christ alone?

Interlinear Text

כָּמֶל אֶת	הָעִיר	בֵּת וְ	תִּבְעֵר	בָּא וְ	וְהַשְׁלִשִׁית
are fulfilled	of the city	in the midst	Thou shalt burn	with fire	a third part
H4390	H5892	H8432	H1197	H217	H7992
תִּכָּה	וְהַשְׁלִשִׁית	אֶת	וְלָקַחְתָּ	הַמָּצוֹר	יָמֵי
and smite	a third part	H853	and thou shalt take	of the siege	when the days
H5221	H7992		H3947	H4692	H3117
וְכָרַב	לְרֵיחַ	תִּזְרֶה	וְהַשְׁלִשִׁית	סָבִיב וְיָהּ	וְכָרַב
a sword	in the wind	thou shalt scatter	a third part	about	a sword
H2719	H7307	H2219	H7992	H5439	H2719
אֶחָד יִקָּח	אַחֲרֵיהֶם:				
and I will draw out	after				
H7324	H310				

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 5:12 (Word): A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

Leviticus 26:33 (Word): And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

Jeremiah 9:16 (Word): I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.

Jeremiah 15:2 (Word): And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.

Ezekiel 12:14 (Word): And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them.