

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 9

In this chapter is contained a vision, representing the destruction of the idolatrous Jews, and the preservation of the godly that were among them, in which different persons were employed; they that were concerned in the destruction of the idolaters are described by their office; they had charge over the city; by their form and appearance, men; by their number, six; by the quarter from whence they came, the way of the higher gate northward; and by the weapons they had in their hands, slaughter ones; and by their place and posture, standing beside the brasen altar, (~~300~~Ezekiel 9:1,2); among these were one clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side; to whom the glorious God of Israel, who was removed from the cherub to the threshold of the house, gave orders to go through the city of Jerusalem, and mark those that mourned over the abominations of it, (~~300~~Ezekiel 9:3,4); and the rest he ordered to go through the city, and slay all of every age, and sex, and state, except those that had the mark; beginning at the sanctuary, and filling the courts with the slain; which orders were obeyed, (~~300~~Ezekiel 9:5-7); upon which the prophet expostulates with the Lord, and intercedes for the people; but is not heard, because of the abounding of iniquity among them; their frequent shedding of blood; their perversion of justice; and their abominable infidelity and atheism; for which reasons he was determined to show them no mercy, (~~300~~Ezekiel 9:8-10); and the chapter is closed with a report made by the man clothed with linen, that he had done as was commanded him, (~~301~~Ezekiel 9:11).

Ver. 1. *He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, &c.*] That is, the glory of the Lord God of Israel, whom the prophet saw in the temple, and who directed him from place to place, and showed him all the abominations committed there: this loud voice of the Lord was not so much to excite the attention of the prophet, as to call together the ministers of his vengeance; and to show the greatness of his indignation, and the vehemence of his wrath, which was stirred up by the sins of the people:

saying, cause them that have the charge over the city to draw near; or,

“who were appointed over the city,”

as the Targum; that is, the city of Jerusalem; by whom are meant either the ministering angels, who had been the guardians of it, but now were to be employed another way; or the princes of the Chaldean army, who had a charge against the city to destroy it; (see ^{<2306>}Isaiah 10:6 ^{<2421>}Jeremiah 34:21). The Syriac version is, “draw near, ye avengers of the city”; and the Septuagint and Arabic versions are “the vengeance of the city draws nigh”:

even every man [with] his destroying weapon in his hand; weapons of war, as bows and arrows, sword and spear; (see ^{<2462>}Jeremiah 6:22,23).

Ver. 2. *And, behold, six men,* &c.] Either angels the form of men; or the generals of Nebuchadnezzar’s army, as Kimchi interprets it; whose names are, Nergalsharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergalsharezer, Rabmag, (^{<2498>}Jeremiah 39:3); these six executioners of God’s vengeance are, in the Talmud^{f132}, called

“wrath, anger, fury, destruction, breach, and consumption:”

came from the way of the higher gate, Kimchi observes, from the Rabbins, that this is the eastern gate called the higher or upper gate, because it was above the court of the Israelites. Maimonides^{f133} says, the upper gate is the gate Nicanor; and why is it called the upper gate? because it was above the court of the women; (see ^{<1255>}2 Kings 15:35);

which lieth toward the north: where were the image of jealousy, and the women weeping for Tammuz, and other idolatrous practices were committed; which were the cause of the coming of these destroyers: moreover, the Chaldean army with its generals came out of the north; for Babylon lay north or northeast of Jerusalem; and so this gate, as Kimchi says, was northeast; and he adds, and Babylon was northeast of the land of Israel; (see ^{<2013>}Jeremiah 1:13,14 4:6,7);

and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; as ordered, (^{<2800>}Ezekiel 9:1), a different word is here used; it signifies a hammer, with which rocks are broken in pieces, as the above mentioned Jewish writer observes. The Septuagint render it an axe or hatchet:

and one man among them; not one of the six, but who made a seventh. The Jews say this was Gabriel^{f134}; but this was not a created angel, as they; nor the Holy Spirit as Cocceius; but the Son of God, in a human form; he

was among the six, at the head of them, as their leader and commander; he was but one, they six; one Saviour, and six destroyers:

[was] clothed with linen; not in the habit of a warrior, but of a priest; who, as such, had made atonement for the sins of his people, and intercession for them; and this may also denote the purity of his human nature, and his unspotted righteousness, the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints: and

with a writer's inkhorn by his side; or "at his loins"^{f135}; nor a slaughter weapon, as the rest; but a writer's inkhorn; hence Kimchi takes him to be the king of Babylon's scribe; but a greater is here meant; even he who took down the names of God's elect in the book of life; and who takes an account, and keeps a book of the words, and even thoughts, of his people and also of their sighs, groans, and tears; (see ^{<3016>}Malachi 3:16 ^{<3708>}Psalm 56:8); but now his business was to mark his people, and distinguish them from others, in a providential way; and keep and preserve them from the general ruin and destruction that was coming upon Jerusalem: or, "a girdle on his loins", as the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions render it; and so was prepared and fit for business; which sense of the word is approved of by Castel^{f136}; and he asks, what has an inkhorn to do at a man's loins? but it should be observed, that it was the custom of the eastern people to carry inkhorns at their sides, and particularly in their girdles, as the Turks do now; who not only fix their knives and poniards in them, as Dr. Shaw^{f137} relates; but the "hojias", that is, the writers and secretaries, hang their inkhorns in them; and by whom it is observed, that that part of these inkhorns which passes between the girdle and the tunic, and holds their pens, is long and flat; but the vessel for the ink, which rests upon the girdle, is square, with a lid to clasp over it:

and they went in; to the temple, all seven:

and stood beside the brasen altar; the altar of burnt offering, so called to distinguish it from the altar of incense, which was of gold; here they stood not to offer sacrifice, but waiting for their orders, to take vengeance for the sins committed in the temple, and at this altar; near to which stood the image of jealousy, (^{<3016>}Ezekiel 8:5).

Ver. 3. *And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, &c.]* That is, the glorious God of Israel; or the glorious Shechinah, and divine Majesty, which dwelt between the cherubim over the

mercy seat in the most holy place, removed from thence, as a token of his being about to depart from the temple, which in a short time would be destroyed. The Targum is,

“the glory of the God of Israel departed in the cherub on which he dwelt, in the house of the holy of holies;”

the cherubim removed with him, and were his chariot in which he rode; (see ³⁰⁰⁸Ezekiel 10:18 11:22);

to the threshold of the house; of the holy of holies, as Jarchi interprets it; and so was nearer to the brasen altar, where the seven men stood, to give them their orders; of which an account follows:

and he called to the man clothed with linen, which [had] the writer's inkhorn by his side; he, being the principal person, is called first; and his business being to preserve the Lord's people shows that this was the first care of God.

Ver. 4. *And the Lord said unto him, &c.*] This shows that a divine Person is meant by the glory of the God of Israel:

go through the midst of the city; that is, as it is next explained,

through the midst of Jerusalem; the city the six men had the charge over or against, (³⁰⁰⁹Ezekiel 9:1);

and set a mark upon the foreheads; not the Hebrew letter **ט**, as some say, because in the form of a cross, and so signifying salvation by the cross of Christ; for this letter has no such form, neither in the characters used by the Jews, nor by the Samaritans, at least in the present character; though Origen and Jerom on the place say that the letter “tau” had the form of a cross in the letters the Samaritans used in their time; and this is defended by Walton ^{f138}, who observes, that Azariah in his Hebrew alphabet gives a double figure, one like that which is in present use, and another in the form of a cross, called St. Andrew's cross, and as it appears in some shekels; and in the Vatican alphabet, which Angelus E Roccha published, the last letter has the form of a cross; as have the Ethiopic and Coptic alphabets, which, it is certain, sprung from the ancient Hebrew; and so Montfaucon says ^{f139}, in some Samaritan coins, the letter “thau” has the form of a cross; which, if Scaliger had met with, he says he would never have opposed the testimonies of Origen and Jerom; though, after all, it seems to be no other

than the form of the Greek “x”; and so the Talmudists say^{f140} the high priest, was anointed on his forehead in the same form: some think this letter was the mark, because it is the first letter of the word **hrwt**, “the law”; as if it pointed out such who were obedient to it; or of the word **hyj t** “thou shall live”. It is a Rabbinical fancy, mentioned by Kimchi^{f141}, that Gabriel had orders to write the letter **t** in ink upon the foreheads of the righteous, and in blood upon the foreheads of the wicked; in the one it signified **hyj t**, “thou shall live”, and in the other **twmt**, “thou shall die”; but, as Calvin observes, rather, if this letter could be thought to be meant, the reason of it was, because it is the last letter of the alphabet; and so may signify, that the Lord’s people marked with it are the last among men, or the faith of the world; or that such who persevere to the end shall be saved: but the word signifies, not a letter, but a mark or sign; and so it is interpreted in the Septuagint version, and by the Targum, Jarchi, Kimchi, and others; and denotes the distinction the Lord had made by his grace between them and others; and now by his power and providence in the protection of them; for the, Lord knows them that are his, and will preserve them. The allusion is either to the marking of servants in their foreheads, by which they were known who they belonged to, (⁽⁴⁰¹⁸⁾ Revelation 7:3); or to the sprinkling of the posts of the Israelites’ houses with blood, when the firstborn of Egypt were destroyed, (⁽⁴⁰²²⁾ Exodus 12:22, 23);

of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof; the abominations were those abominable idolatries mentioned in the preceding chapter, and those dreadful immoralities hinted at in (⁽⁴⁰⁰⁹⁾ Ezekiel 9:9); all which were grieving and distressing to godly minds, because they were contrary to the nature and will of God; transgressions, of his righteous law; and on account of which his name was dishonoured, and his ways blasphemed and evil spoken of; for these they sighed and groaned in private, and mourned and lamented in public; bearing their testimony against them with bitter expressions of grief and sorrow, by groans, words, and tears; and such as these are taken notice of by the Lord; he comforts those that mourn in Zion, and preserves them.

Ver. 5. *And, to the others he said in mine hearing, &c.]* To the other six men that had the slaughter weapons in their hands:

go ye after him through the city; that is, after the man clothed with linen; for he was sent out first to take care of the righteous, and preserve them; and the rest were not suffered to stir till he was gone; and then they are bid to go after him. The Syriac version is,

“to them that were with him he said to them before me, go through the city after me;”

as if these were the words of the man clothed with linen to the other six; and so the Arabic version; of it the other is the true reading, and gives the right sense, as the following words show:

and smite; the inhabitants of the city:

let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity; not that the Chaldeans were inclined to mercy and pity, for they were a cruel and barbarous people; but this is said to show the resentment of God against the sins of the Jews; and that it was his will they should act the severe part they did.

Ver. 6. *Slay utterly old [and] young, both maids, and little children, and women, &c.*] All, of them objects of compassion, because of their age and sex; and yet none to be spared; and which orders were exactly obeyed; (see ^{<4837>}2 Chronicles 36:17);

but come not near any man on whom [is] the mark; these were not to be slain; and though some were carried captive, as Daniel, and others; yet it was for their good and God’s glory; (see ^{<6013>}Revelation 7:3,4 9:3,4);

and begin at my sanctuary; the temple, the house of God, and the priests and Levites that dwelt there. The Septuagint version is, “begin at my saints”; those who professed themselves to be the saints of the Lord, and were separated and devoted to his service; and so the Rabbins say^{f142}, do not read *yçdqmm*, “at my sanctuary”; but *yçdwqmm*, “at those that sanctify me”, or “my sanctified ones”; which they interpret of those that keep the whole law, from “aleph” to “tau”; (see ^{<6017>}1 Peter 4:17);

then they began at the ancient men which [were] before the house; the seventy elders of Israel, who offered incense to the idols portrayed upon the walls of the chambers of the temple, (^{<3180>}Ezekiel 8:10,11); these they slew first.

Ver. 7. *And he said unto them, defile the house, &c.*] The temple; do not be afraid of slaying any person in it, for fear of defiling it; they have defiled it with their abominations, and now do you defile it with their blood:

and fill the courts with the slain; the court of the priests, and the court of the Israelites, and the court of the women, and all the chambers where the priests and Levites were, and had their images portrayed:

go ye forth; from the brasen altar by which they stood, and out of the temple, after they had done their business there, and had slain all they should:

and they went forth, and slew in the city; they went out of the temple, and slew in the city all but those that had the mark.

Ver. 8. *And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, &c.*] That were in the city:

and I was left; in the temple; and the only one that was left there, the rest were slain; for there were none marked in the temple, only in the city, (²⁰⁰⁴Ezekiel 9:4);

that I fell upon my face; as a suppliant, with great humility:

and cried, and said; being greatly distressed with this awful providence:

ah, Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel; the ten tribes had been carried captive before; there only remained the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and these were now threatened with an utter destruction:

in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? shown in the destruction of men, both in the city and temple, by famine, pestilence, and sword.

Ver. 9. *Then he said unto me, &c.*] In order to satisfy the prophet, and make him easy, and show the equity and justice of the divine proceedings:

the iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah [is] exceeding great; it cannot be well conceived or expressed how great it is; it abounded and superabounded: this is the answer in general, but in particular it follows:

and the land is full of blood; of murders, as the Targum interprets it; of shedding of innocent blood; and even of all atrocious and capital crimes:

and the city full of perverseness; or of perversion of judgment, as the Targum; the city of Jerusalem, where was the highest court of judicature,

where the sanhedrim of seventy one sat to do justice and judgment, have nothing but perversion and injustice:

for they say, the Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not; does not concern himself with human affairs, and takes no notice of what is done below; and, having imbibed such atheistical principles, were hardened in sin, and gave themselves over to all iniquity; having no restraints upon them from the consideration of the providence of God, and his government of the world: or else the sense is, that the Lord had withheld his mercy and favours from them; and therefore they showed no regard to him, and looked upon all their evils and calamities as fortuitous events, and not as ordered by him as punishments for their sins.

Ver. 10. *And as for me also, &c.*] As they have not spared the poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless, but have perverted their judgment, and shed innocent blood:

mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, [but] I will recompence their way upon their head; deal with them by the law of retaliation, and reward them according to their deserts; (see ^{<2004>}Ezekiel 7:4).

Ver. 11. *And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which [had] the inkhorn by his side, &c.*] (^{<2002>}Ezekiel 9:2); to whom the orders were given to mark the mourners in the city, (^{<2004>}Ezekiel 9:4). The Syriac version is, “then I saw the man”, &c. which must direct him to observe and call to mind the distinguishing goodness of God to his own people:

reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me; meaning that the righteous were marked, and had been preserved, while the others were slain. Christ, as man and Mediator, sustains the character of a servant; as such he has commands enjoined him, which he has obeyed; he has done all he was to do; he has fulfilled the whole will of God, and wrought out the complete salvation of his people; a report of which he made when here on earth, (^{<2007>}John 17:4); and will do again at the last day; when all his people will be gathered in, and he shall deliver the kingdom to the Father, and present them all to him, having been kept by his power, saying, “lo, I and the children thou hast given me”, (^{<2008>}Isaiah 8:18); when all will be done as was commanded, and he undertook, and the report made accordingly. Ben Melech observes, that the “Keri”, or marginal reading is,

“according to all which thou hast commanded me;”

as if he should say, there is nothing wanting of all that was commanded.