

Judah's Captivity

(11) Ezekiel 12

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Ezekiel chapters 12-24, in today's idiom, could be entitled "Objections to Judgment", as long as it is understood that the objections are raised only to be demolished. These are some of the objections that are answered in this extended section:

- We have heard this all before, but it hasn't happened
- Those who say we will be delivered are right
- God will never do this to His people

Kind of like what people have to say about the coming judgment of God today.

Ezek 12:1-7 – Acting out Judah's captivity

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house. By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it. In their sight you shall bear them on your shoulders and carry them out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel. So I did as I was commanded. I brought out my belongings by day, as though going into captivity, and at evening I dug through the wall with my hand. I brought them out at twilight, and I bore them on my shoulder in their sight.

Now the word of the Lord came to me: This begins another section of Ezekiel's prophetic work, mainly a series of announcements of judgment coming against the kingdom of Judah.

Where did Ezekiel dwell?

You dwell in the midst of a rebellious house: Ezekiel was among a rebellious people, those who had been carried into exile under the Babylonians. Ezekiel was also part of

the larger community of Israel, including those still living in the yet-to-be judged and conquered kingdom of Judah.

What characterized the rebellious house of Israel?

Which has eyes to see but does not see: This was part of the great tragedy for the children of Israel. Because they had the word of God, the institution of the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the temple, and because they had the prophets of Yahweh among them they *could have* seen and heard – but they would not.

What did God call Ezekiel to do?

Prepare your belongings for captivity: God commanded Ezekiel to act as if he were going into captivity or exile. He *already was* an exile in Babylon, but God wanted him to act this out among the exiles to make a message from God clear: all those remaining in Judah and Jerusalem would **go into captivity**.

Why would God have Ezekiel act out something that had already happened among the exiles?

There were many false prophets in Judah, Jerusalem, and likely among the exiles in Babylon who promised that God would *rescue* His people from the Babylonians. These false prophets spoke smooth words of certain deliverance. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel strongly warned them that this deliverance would not come, and that God had appointed them to be conquered.

- Ezekiel was to play the part of an exile, reenacting a scene all the exiles had painfully experienced when led from their land. He dramatized the fate of the survivors of the Jerusalem siege.

What was Ezekiel to do with his belongings?

He was to portray captives being led away in procession with large bags slung over their shoulders. The packs were made either of durable cloth or skin, and loaded with such bare necessities for survival during the long trek as could be salvaged from the ruins of a conquered city.

Why was Ezekiel told to dig through a wall?

Dig through the wall in their sight: Ezekiel was also to act out a person desperately escaping from a city surrounded

by siege. These also could end up as exiles, leaving with their face covered in shame (**cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground**).

- In particular King Zedekiah will creep out of the city walls by night (2 Kings 25:4), but would be caught and brought to Babylon.

How did Ezekiel respond to God's command to act out going into exile?

So I did as I was commanded: God asked Ezekiel to act out so that both his words and his actions would communicate God's warning.

As though going into captivity: Ezekiel became a living lesson to his fellow exiles in Babylon, and perhaps to those in Judah who would hear of his strange actions and what those actions meant.

- Perhaps this action would make this rebellious people realize that those left in Jerusalem would shortly be joining those who had been deported to Babylon.

How is it that, like Ezekiel, we too live in a rebellious house?

Most people reject the Bible's revelation of God. Despite our nation being founded on Christian principles and most people embracing cultural Christianity, they have failed to engage in a personal journey that would lead them into a personal relationship with the Savior.

What do we mean by having a personal relationship with the Savior?

Having a personal relationship with God means we have communion with one another... we speak to Him regularly in prayer and we listen to Him through many ways and especially His Word, the Bible.

How does a personal relationship with our Creator begin?

It begins the moment we realize our need for Him, admit we are sinners, and in faith receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

How do we know that God wants us to have a personal relationship with Him?

Before Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden (Genesis chapter 3), both he and Eve knew God on an intimate, personal level. They walked with Him in the garden and talked directly to Him. Due to the sin of man, we became separated and disconnected from God.

How does having a personal relationship with God make Christianity distinct from all other religions?

All other religions are man-centered being based on man's works. They are all similar in that they are built

upon the concept that man can reach a higher power or state of being through his own efforts. Thus man is the aggressor and the deity is the beneficiary of man's efforts, sacrifices, or good deeds. Paradise, nirvana, or some higher state of being is man's reward for his strict adherence to whatever tenets that religion prescribes.

In sharp contrast, Christianity is *not* a religion; it is a relationship that God has established with His children. In Christianity, God is the aggressor and man is the beneficiary (Romans 8:3). The Bible states clearly that there is nothing man can do to make himself right with God. All we must do is accept God's gift of salvation through faith...

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Ezek 12:8-14 – The message to the princes

And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them." Say, 'I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.' And the prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes. I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there. I will scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops; and I will draw out the sword after them.

What did the rebellious house of Israel ask Ezekiel?

What are you doing? Ezekiel's strange actions invited this question. That was the whole purpose for an exiled man acting as if he were going into exile all over again.

- Their eyes had seen plainly enough what he had done; at issue is the significance of his actions.

How did God instruct Ezekiel to respond to those questioning his acting out?

This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them: The prophet clearly explained that those who were about to go into exile were not those already in Babylon, but those still in Jerusalem and Judah. The warning was for both **the prince** and **all the house of Israel**.

- *The prince*, specifically, was Zedekiah. “The subject of the message was King Zedekiah, who was always spoken of by Ezekiel as prince, never king. Jehoiachin was regarded as the true king (Ezekiel 17:13).
- Zedekiah was called ‘the prince’ (v.12) because he was not the legitimate king. That right belonged to Jehoiachin who was in Babylonia.

What was prophesied of the prince still in Jerusalem?

The prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder: Even the mighty and prominent men among them would be brought low and have to bear their own burdens – something princes are not used to doing.

2 Kings 25:4 – *Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king’s garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain.*

Why would the prince cover his face as he escaped Jerusalem?

Some think the prince would do this out of shame, others to disguise himself. Either way, it spoke of defeat and not deliverance.

What would God do about the fleeing prince?

I will also spread My net over him: This refers to king Zedekiah of Judah, who tried to escape but was caught, captured, and made captive to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:2-4 and 2 Kings 25:4). His soldiers would be powerless to help him; God promised to **scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops.**

What became of the prince who escaped Jerusalem?

Yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there: This was fulfilled...

Jeremiah 39:6-7 – *Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah’s eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.*

The Babylonians were not known to be as cruel as the Assyrians who conquered the northern kingdom of Israel some 130 years earlier, but they were still experts in cruelty in their own right. They made certain that the last sight King Zedekiah saw was the murder of his own sons, and then spent the rest of his life in darkness.

- All the prophecies from this to the 12th chapter are supposed to have been delivered in the *sixth* year of Zedekiah, *five* years before the taking of Jerusalem.

Ezek 12:15-20 – The sign of the bread

“Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. But I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.” Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, *“Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety. And say to the people of the land, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the land of Israel: “They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with dread, so that her land may be emptied of all who are in it, because of the violence of all those who dwell in it. Then the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall become desolate; and you shall know that I am the Lord.””*

Again, the purpose of the coming judgment...

Then they shall know that I am the Lord: Ezekiel often used this phrase to explain *why* God allowed such great and devastating judgment to come against His people. In the end, it was to reveal Himself to them, even if it were in His judgments.

Who would escape God’s judgment?

I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence: God promised to **spare** a remnant, so they could **declare** the sins of God’s people among the Gentiles, and so that God may be revealed.

What did God instruct Ezekiel to do?

Eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety: God told Ezekiel to act out another sign speaking of the coming conquest and captivity of Jerusalem and Judah. Those under siege would be so traumatized by their experience that they could not even eat or drink without quaking and trembling.

- Eating and drinking represent life at its most basic level, carrying on as if all is well. But the accompanying trembling announces the opposite.
- He was illustrating the condition of people in Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege. They would have very little food and would eat with fear and trembling because it might be their last meal.

To whom was Ezekiel told to speak?

Say to the people of the land: This phrase is used consistently to refer to the peasant population of Judah, as distinct from the ruling classes, and particularly to those left there during the exile.

How would the people recognize that it was God who was punishing Israel?

The fulfillment of prophecy...

Then the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste: When the siege was over, the **cities** would be conquered and all carried off into captivity (**the land shall become desolate**).

Ezek 12:21-28 – Answering a false proverb.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, ‘The days are prolonged, and every vision fails’? Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.” But say to them, “The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it,” says the Lord God. Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’ Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done,” says the Lord God.

What is the proverb that Ezekiel was to address?

The days are prolonged, and every vision fails: This was the **proverb** in use among the people of Israel in Ezekiel’s day. By it they meant that things would continue on as before (**the days are prolonged**) and that the visions and prophecies of doom would never come to pass (**every vision fails**).

How do we see the grace of God in this proverb?

The days are prolonged was actually an act of God’s mercy... this saying came into being because of God’s long-suffering so that more people would repent and be saved, but instead was made into an argument against His word.

How did God regard the conventional wisdom of this popular proverb?

I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel: God promised to permanently answer this proverb, forever proving it wrong. Things would *not* continue on as before, and the visions of judgment would not fail and would come to pass.

The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision: The sad and terrible things prophesied by Ezekiel,

Jeremiah, and many others *would* come to pass. God promised, **the word which I speak will come to pass**.

What were the flattering divinations that would cease?

Divination suggests that the false prophets used mechanical means of obtaining their oracles, either by the use of lots or by throwing arrows into the air and studying the way they fell, or by other methods of discerning omens.

How did the people justify their ignoring of Ezekiel’s prophecy about Jerusalem?

The vision that he sees is for many days from now: They rationalized that whatever danger he might announce was for a distant future, and **he prophesies of times far off**.

- They did not deny that he spoke the word of God; but comforted themselves with the reflection that it was not likely to be fulfilled for some time yet.

What did God say about the rationalization that the doom of Jerusalem would be in the distant future?

None of My words will be postponed any more: God promised there would be no more delay in the carrying out of the terrible things He had warned of for so long.

How do we see this proverb in today’s context?

Uniformitarianism – the idea that Earth has always changed in uniform ways and that the present is the key to the past.

2 Peter 3-4 – *scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.*

People inside and outside the church dismiss the idea that God will pour out His wrath on earth in conjunction with Jesus returning to establish His Millennial Kingdom.

- This is another sign that we are in the season of the Lord’s return... that most of the church scoffs at the idea that Jesus will return soon despite all the evidence: Israel, world geopolitics, technology, apostasy, etc.
- Uniformitarianism emerged with the theory of evolution requiring long periods of time to make the impossible seem possible.

What application do we see in this passage?

- We too live in a rebellious house.
- God’s judgment is closer than we think.
- Scoffing is a sign of being in the season of the Lord’s return