EZEKIEL

Chapter 12

*The Exile Symbolized*

**The word of the LORD came to me:  2 “Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people. 3 “Therefore, son of man, pack your belongings for exile and in the daytime, as they watch, set out and go from where you are to another place. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house.  4 During the daytime, while they watch, bring out your belongings packed for exile. Then in the evening, while they are watching, go out like those who go into exile.  5 While they watch, dig through the wall and take your belongings out through it.  6 Put them on your shoulder as they are watching and carry them out at dusk. Cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel.” 7 So I did as I was commanded. During the day I brought out my things packed for exile. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands. I took my belongings out at dusk, carrying them on my shoulders while they watched. 8 In the morning the word of the LORD came to me:  9 “Son of man, did not that rebellious house of Israel ask you, ‘What are you doing?’ 10 “Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and the whole house of Israel who are there.’  11 Say to them, ‘I am a sign to you.’ “As I have done, so it will be done to them. They will go into exile as captives. 12 “The prince among them will put his things on his shoulder at dusk and leave, and a hole will be dug in the wall for him to go through. He will cover his face so that he cannot see the land.  13 I will spread my net for him, and he will be caught in my snare; I will bring him to Babylonia, the land of the Chaldeans, but he will not see it, and there he will die.  14 I will scatter to the winds all those around him—his staff and all his troops—and I will pursue them with drawn sword. 15 “They will know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries.  16 But I will spare a few of them from the sword, famine and plague, so that in the nations where they go they may acknowledge all their detestable practices. Then they will know that I am the LORD.” 17 The word of the LORD came to me:  18 “Son of man, tremble as you eat your food, and shudder in fear as you drink your water.  19 Say to the people of the land: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says about those living in Jerusalem and in the land of Israel: They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair, for their land will be stripped of everything in it because of the violence of all who live there.  20 The inhabited towns will be laid waste and the land will be desolate. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’” 21 The word of the LORD came to me:  22 “Son of man, what is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: ‘The days go by and every vision comes to nothing’?  23 Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to put an end to this proverb, and they will no longer quote it in Israel.’ Say to them, ‘The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled.  24 For there will be no more false visions or flattering divinations among the people of Israel.  25 But I the LORD will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days, you rebellious house, I will fulfill whatever I say, declares the Sovereign LORD.’” 26 The word of the LORD came to me:  27 “Son of man, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future.’ 28 “Therefore say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: None of my words will be delayed any longer; whatever I say will be fulfilled, declares the Sovereign LORD.’”**

As one subdivides the book of Ezekiel, all of the remaining chapters (12–24) until the Gentile oracles (chapters 25–32) can be lumped together as a miscellaneous collection of oracles of judgment upon Israel and Jerusalem. The section can be considered as a reprise of earlier material, especially of chapters 4–7, between the call narrative (chapters 1–3) and the visionary tour of Jerusalem (chapters 8–11). Yet beyond such generalities, this section (chapters 12–24) certainly has its various distinctives, as we shall see. No chronological data allowing us to date these oracles precisely is given until 20:1, where the date (August 14, 591 b.c.) is eleven months after the last previous date, in 8:1 (ca. September 18, 592 b.c.). All of the oracles in this section easily could have been given within that time, still well before the fall of Jerusalem itself in 586 b.c. (CC)

The prophecies in this section vary widely in form, length, and specific subject matter. To a certain extent, their arrangement might appear random to us. Yet there are some indications of deliberate groupings of similar subject matter. (CC)

Initially, we meet a collection of two action prophecies (12:1–16 and 12:17–20). It may not be coincidental that these follow immediately after the vision of chapters 8–11, just as the first action prophecies in the book (chapters 4–5) immediately followed the call vision (chapters 1–3). The action prophecy that concludes this part of the book (24:15–27) does not follow a vision. Nevertheless, these two collections of action prophecies (12:1–20 and 24:15–27) that frame chapters 12–24 contain certain common features not found in the other action prophecies: (1) both report that the prophet was obeying a divine command; (2) both report requests by the audience that the prophet explain what the actions meant; and (3) both describe the prophet as a מוֹפֵת (“portent,” 12:6, 11; 24:24, 27) for the people. The pairing of the prophet’s physical props and actions with the prophetic Word from Yahweh can be compared to the pairing of God’s Word and Sacraments to serve as joint means of grace for the Christian church. (CC)

Two other groupings are obvious. In 12:21–14:11 five oracles are clustered about true prophecy and Ezekiel as a true prophet versus false prophecy, prophets, and prophetesses. Second, in chapters 18–19, two oracles concerning the “generation gap” are put side by side, although they differ radically in form. (CC)

**12:1-16** The first unit of this chapter concerns the exile, especially of the prince. It consists of two parts: an action prophecy (12:1–7) and an oracle that explains the symbolism of the prophet’s actions and props (12:8–16). The two parts extend over two days. Ezekiel is to carry out his activity during the daytime and evening of the first day, then interpret it the next morning. Similar time spans occur in 24:18 and 33:22. (CC)

**12:1-2** As commonly in Ezekiel, the message opens with the word-event formula (“the Word of Yahweh came to me,” 12:1) followed by the address of the prophet as “son of man” (12:2). These are repeated almost verbatim in 12:8–9, at the beginning of the second part of the unit. (CC)

Before the action prophecy itself, Yahweh gives the reason for it: the obduracy of the people, twice called a “rebellious house” (12:2). The refrain that Israel is a “rebellious house” first appeared in the prophet’s commissioning (2:5–8; 3:9) and was prominent in 3:26–27, immediately before the first block of action prophecies (4:1–5:12). Its repetition here has added sharpness, because for more than a year Ezekiel has been preaching, but to no apparent avail. As Taylor comments:

The preacher’s knowledge that his words will be ignored is never to be used as an excuse for not uttering the words. … [Ezekiel] may be regarded as the exemplar for all Christian workers in seemingly impossible situations or in singularly unfruitful spheres of service. (CC)

To make his point, Ezekiel draws on an apparently well-known saying: the people “have eyes to see, but they do not see, and ears to hear, but they do not hear” (12:2). Ironically, they have become like the idols they worshiped (Pss 115:5; 135:16; cf. Rom 1:23–25). The phraseology is as old as Moses (Deut 29:4). Yahweh’s words to Ezekiel about the people are nearly identical to those he addressed to Jeremiah about them (Jer 5:21). Similar wording appears also in Yahweh’s call of Isaiah (Is 6:9–10) and is echoed in Is 43:8; 44:18. It is noteworthy that our Lord cites Isaiah’s similar formulation (Is 6:9–10) when explaining why he speaks to the people in parables (Mt 13:13–15 and parallels; cf. Jn 12:37–41), and his words in Mk 8:18 echo Ezek 12:2. The obduracy of ancient Israel was no greater than the stubborn unbelief Jesus Christ encountered during his ministry and that every faithful preacher of the Gospel inevitably meets. All descendants of Adam constitute a “rebellious house” congenitally, with original sin (and hence the sentence of death) inherited from the first man (cf. Rom 5:12–21). (CC)

The action prophecy itself is designed to appeal to the people’s sense of sight. The vocabulary of 12:3–7 bears witness to that by its frequent use of “in their sight” (literally, “to their eyes”), “see,” and various words for the time of day. The preached explanation in 12:8–16 will be directed toward their hearing. (CC)

**12:2** *eyes to see but do not see.* The hardening about which the Lord had spoken to Isaiah (Isa 6:9–10). (CSB)

**12:3** *pack your belongings.* Another symbolic act, which, like those in chs. 4–5, follows a vision. (CSB)

 *Perhaps they will understand.* Some hope remained that they would change.

The prophecy seems most pertinent for those still in Jerusalem, although Ezekiel’s fellow exiles in Babylon were clearly still in agreement that the city would never fall. The action prophecy of going into exile begins with a general description of the mime to be carried out initially in broad daylight so all can “see.” But the last part of the verse also reveals God’s intent that “perhaps they will see that they are a rebellious house”—“see” in the sense of understanding and repenting. Despite being a “rebellious house,” the possibility remains that the prophetic actions and words will accomplish God’s salvific will among them and at least some Israelites will “see the light” (cf. Mt 4:13–16, quoting Is 9:1–2). Deathbed conversions are possible, but relatively rare. Most people die as they lived. But as long as there is life, there is hope for repentance, faith, and salvation. God hopes, and so should we—and act accordingly. (CC)

**12:4** DAYTIME…EVENING **– T**his verse clearly describes two initial stages. First, Ezekiel is to gather his essential belongings, pack them in a bag, and in broad daylight bring them somewhere outside his house to show that he is prepared to be forced into exile. Second, in the evening (presumably at twilight before it had become totally dark), he should actually act out the departure. (CC)

**12:5** *dig through the wall.* Not the city wall, which was made of stone and was many feet thick, but the sun-dried brick wall of his house. (CSB)

As Ezekiel burrows through the wall from the outside in 12:5a, he represents the attacking enemy. Once inside his house, he switches roles in 12:5b and again (as in 12:3–4) represents the people as he brings out his knapsack through the hole he made. He continues the role of the people (and their prince) in the next verse. (CC)

**12:6** COVER YOUR FACE – Yahweh adds another detail: Ezekiel is to cover his face as he emerges. This gesture is mentioned in many biblical passages (e.g., Gen 38:15; 2 Sam 15:30), and its significance depends on the context. Its implication here is widely debated. The only explanation Yahweh gives here is that the action prevents Ezekiel from seeing “the ground” (the most likely meaning of הָאָ֑רֶץ in this verse). But the Hebrew word often means “land, country,” and that meaning is also possible when the clause is repeated in Ezek 12:12. Many commentators have interpreted the gesture as indicating either shame or grief. Zimmerli probably is correct when he surmises that the gesture “also plaintively hides the lost homeland from the view of the exiles.” (CC)

 *sign.* Prophets were often instructed to perform symbolic acts (see, e.g., v. 11; 24:24, 27). (CSB)

In all of this, to the Israelites Ezekiel is to be a מוֹפֵת, “portent, sign, wonder.” This term occurs in 12:6, 11; 24:24, 27, always describing the prophet as he carries out his ministry. It is a synonym of אוֹת, used in 4:3 for the “sign” Ezekiel performed (see the textual note and commentary there). “Portent(s)” had described the miracles performed by Moses and Aaron to demonstrate Yahweh’s power (e.g., Ex 4:21; 7:9; 11:10; cf. Acts 7:36) and also the plagues performed by Yahweh himself, designed to move Pharaoh and the Egyptians to repentance (Ex 7:3; 11:9; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19). “Sign” and “portent” may be used together, almost as a hendiadys, as when the prophet Isaiah and his sons are called “signs and portents” (Is 8:18). Thus generally we may understand the prophets in their persons, not only in their words and actions, as portending the divine message. The infant Lord is the “sign” in Lk 2:12. In Peter’s Pentecost sermon he proclaimed Christ as the one who both fulfilled and performed divine “portents” (τέρατα, Acts 2:19–22). He *is* the Word incarnate, and he also proclaims it. The apostles too performed “portents,” in Christ’s name. (CC)

**12:7** DID AS COMMANDED – Rarely does Ezekiel report his obedience to God’s commands. (He will do so again in 24:18 and 37:7). In his brief report, he both adds one detail (“by hand”) and omits another detail that was in the command (covering his face). The focus is on the knapsack and on his obedience in the people’s sight. (CC)

**12:8-9** These verses introduce the oracle that explains the symbolism of the preceding action prophecy (12:1–7). They show that Ezekiel has at least succeeded in attracting his audience’s attention and curiosity, even if they do not (yet) “see that they are a rebellious house” (12:3). Their question, “What are you doing?” is similar to one recorded in 24:19. But in 33:30–32, Yahweh reminds the prophet that the people still basically regard him as no more than a rather comical showman; they are still uncomprehending or unrepentant or both. (CC)

**12:8** *In the morning.* After Ezekiel “did as … commanded” (v. 7). Again the divine explanation follows the prophet’s unquestioning obedience (see note on 8:3). (CSB)

**12:9** *What are you doing?* The book’s first indication of the people’s response to the prophet’s symbolic acts. (CSB)

**12:10** *prince in Jerusalem.*† Zedekiah. (CSB)

Then Yahweh states that the knapsack symbolizes the king of Jerusalem and the city’s inhabitants who are a “burden” (like a sack) that will be carried into exile. Symbolism and prediction merge throughout 12:10–20. The king and populace are mentioned in one breath (“The prince is this burden … together with the whole house of Israel”). In the OT and ancient Near Eastern thought, the king is considered “the head of the body.” What happens to the head has implications for all. (CC)

But Yahweh does not honor the current ruler in Jerusalem with the title “king” (מֶלֶךְ). Instead, he is labeled as merely a “prince.” This lesser title was applied to tribal chieftains of premonarchical times. Ezekiel may use it here even more generically and deprecatorily: the word appears to be a passive formation of the verb “lift up” (נָשָׂא) and thus could be applied to anyone who happens to be “lifted up” to a position of authority. (CC)

Here it almost certainly refers to King Zedekiah, the puppet whom the Babylonians placed over Jerusalem after the deportation in 597 b.c. and who reigned (but without any real authority) for twelve years until Jerusalem fell in 586 b.c. (counting inclusively; see 2 Ki 24:17–20). Ezekiel may even be alluding to the old objection to the monarchy that Yahweh was Israel’s only real, legitimate king; see 1 Samuel 8 and Ezek 20:33, where Yahweh declares, “I will be king over you!” The legitimate earthly “king” was Jehoiachin, who had been exiled with Ezekiel in 597 b.c. (whereupon Zedekiah was installed). Ezekiel accorded Jehoiachin the title “king” in 1:2, and both the Babylonians and those left in Jerusalem still regarded him as such, even in his exile. Yet Ezekiel’s esteem for the current ruler would not have been much higher even if Jehoiachin were still on the throne, to judge from Jeremiah’s oracles in chapters 21–22, with which Ezekiel would surely have agreed. (CC)

Ezekiel does use “king” (מֶלֶךְ) for the eschatological king, a true son of David, the Messiah (37:22–25), and also names him as “prince” (נָשִׂיא, 34:24). (Why Ezekiel uses “prince” in connection with the eschatological temple in chapters 45–46 is more puzzling; see the discussion in the commentary there.) For Christians, any problem in this respect disappears with the confession that Christ is both true God (and so King of kings) and Son of David, a biological descendant (Mt 1:1, 6) and the royal heir (Is 9:6–7) of the anointed king whose line furnished the legitimate earthly kings who ruled over ancient Israel. (CC)

**12:11** SIGN – Now Ezekiel is to explain how and why he himself is a “portent” (מוֹפֵת, as in 12:6) to his present audience—his fellow exiles—but the import is ultimately about those still in Jerusalem. As in the previous verse, the symbolism still centers on the “burden” of the knapsack. “As I have done, so it will be done to them” is similar to comparisons between the prophet’s behavior and the experience of the people in 24:22, 24. To underscore that the Jerusalemites await the same fate that Ezekiel and his exilic audience have already undergone, “into *exile*” (גּוֹלָה, which has been used now numerous times in Ezekiel) is backed up by a near synonym, “into *captivity*” (שְׁבִי). By using a passive verb (“it will be done to them”), the prophet momentarily refrains from identifying the executor of the judgment, whether Yahweh himself or his human agents, whom he will name in 12:13. (CC)

**12:12** “The prince” (הַנָּשִׂיא) is placed first in Hebrew (unusually, before the verb) for emphasis and is emphasized further toward the end of the verse by a redundant הוּא (“he”; see the last textual note on 12:12). In 12:10 the “burden” of the knapsack represented the prince, but here he is the one who will be forced to pack his belongings himself and sling his knapsack over his shoulder, just like the rest of the exiles. (CC)

The significance of the covering of his face is debated, as it was in 12:6. The meaning may be the same in both verses. Possibly the fleeing king (represented by Ezekiel) would cover his face so that he would not be recognized and captured. However, the effect of the covering is to limit his vision of the land (see the textual notes on 12:12). The אֶרֶץ that he will not see still includes the “ground,” but as the next verse indicates, the meaning of “land” is becoming more prominent. The next verse will focus on Babylonia, but here the primary reference may still be on Judah. That is, he will never return to his native soil. (CC)

Jeremiah had uttered a similar prediction of Jehoahaz (Jer 22:10–12). The theme of never seeing one’s land again was often included in extrabiblical curses. Also, in the fulfillment, Zedekiah was blinded at Riblah before being taken to Babylon (2 Ki 25:6–7). There is no reason to doubt that the covering of Ezekiel’s face to limit his vision was intended by God to prophesy that event (cf. Ezek 6:14, which mentions Riblah by name). (CC)

**12:13** *he will not see it.* Nebuchadnezzar’s men would put out Zedekiah’s eyes (see 2Ki 25:7). (CSB)

In 12:11 Yahweh instructed Ezekiel to speak in the first person (“I am a portent …”), but now in this verse it clearly is Yahweh who is speaking in the first person through Ezekiel’s mouth (“I will spread my net …”). Commonly in Scripture, quotations of direct speech by God and inspired messages by human instruments alternate or are even hard to distinguish. Theologically speaking, the difference is only formal, since the Scriptures in their entirety are the verbally inspired Word of God. (CC)

The point is that the “prince” will not ultimately be captured by Nebuchadnezzar, but by Yahweh himself, who masterminds the historical events and uses them as his means of judgment. The metaphor of Yahweh as a hunter appears frequently elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Is 8:14; Hos 7:12; cf. Ezek 19:8). The motif is also found in extrabiblical treaty curses. (CC)

Since this prophecy corresponds so closely to what later happened in 2 Ki 25:1–7, critical commentators often assume that this is a “prophecy after the event,” added later after Zedekiah’s blinding at Riblah, if not still later, after Zedekiah died in prison in Babylon (Jer 52:11). But the blinding of captives (or threats to deal with disloyal vassals in that way) was such a well-known practice in antiquity that, even humanly speaking, it is no surprise to meet such a prediction. That God caused the historical fulfillment to match the prediction is no less a surprise for a believer in the one true God, who guided all history toward its culmination in the first advent of Christ, and who even now guides the course of events toward the consummation of all history at Christ’s return. (CC)

**12:14-16** God will remove all supports for the throne and will personally pursue the unfaithful prince with the “sword.” But again at the end of a section, in 12:16 Yahweh sounds the promise of the preservation of a remnant (see 5:3 and especially 6:8–10). Yet the reason here is so that they may explain to their new neighbors that their plight was not a result of Yahweh’s weakness, but their deserved punishment for their abominable past. They will simultaneously confess Yahweh’s righteousness and their own sin. Instead of “*relate* all their abominations” (12:16), “confess” would have been a free but appropriate translation. Genuine confession of sin and confession of the faith go together. Both involve relating or confessing acts—the one of man’s sinful behavior and the other of God’s salvific deeds. (CC)

In its grammatical context in 12:16, the subjects of the recognition formula (“then they will know that I am Yahweh”) could include “the nations” as well as the exiles among them, in which case the verse could envision the conversion of the heathen, but that theme is hardly prominent here. Theologically, the subject of the formula here (and generally elsewhere) is “Israel” in the sense of the true, invisible church of both Testaments, consisting of all believers in Christ. Only they can “relate” the full knowledge of the one true and triune God. (CC)

**12:18** *tremble as you eat.* Another prophetic symbol. Ezekiel’s trembling must have been particularly violent, because the Hebrew word for “tremble” is used elsewhere to describe an earthquake (see Am 1:1; 1Ki 19:11). (CSB)

The picture is obviously one of such extreme fright in the chaos and anarchy after Jerusalem’s fall that the people will scarcely be able to manage the elementary activities of eating and drinking. The scene depicted is thus later than the one foretold in 4:9–11, 16–17, which described conditions during the siege. We should envision Ezekiel trembling so uncontrollably that he spills his drink and misses his mouth with his food. (CC)

**12:19** *people of the land.* See note on 7:27. (CSB)

The prophet is ordered to interpret his actions “to the people of the land.” Ezekiel uses that phrase with various meanings, but generally it refers to property owners, people with political influence (e.g., 7:27; 22:29; 33:2; 39:13). Eichrodt detects irony here, and probably correctly so. Ezekiel is addressing his fellow exiles as he prophesies “about the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (12:19). The deportation in 597 b.c., of which Ezekiel and his audience had been a part, had mostly skimmed off the “upper crust,” so many in his audience probably had been (until recently) property owners and people of some influence. But now they are landless and helpless to influence events in Jerusalem. At the same time, they are given the solace that Yahweh does at least recognize their status as “the people of the land” and that the following prophecy is not directed against them. (CC)

Especially in 12:20, it seems clear that the picture is one of the devastation of the entire land (not only Jerusalem) after the coming catastrophe. The picture ultimately goes back to the covenant curses detailed in Lev 26:14–46. The words in Ezek 12:19–20 translated “desolat-” are from or are related to the root שׁמם (see the textual notes), a root also used in the covenant curses of Lev 26:22, 31–35, 43. The proximate reason given for the entire land’s desolation is the “violence” of its inhabitants (Ezek 12:19); see the similar accusations of “violence” (חָמָס) in 7:23 and 8:17. Surely this accusation points to lawless misbehavior throughout Israel’s history (cf. 4:4–8), but the immediate focus here may be on the gangs of bandits and other criminals who were preying on Israelite victims in the social chaos between the first Babylonian incursions into Israel in 605 b.c. and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 b.c., after which time order was restored in Israel (but under Babylonian rule). The suffering of the Israelite inhabitants is attributed directly to the violence they have inflicted upon their fellow Israelites. They may once have deluded themselves into thinking that they could behave so lawlessly with impunity, but they will have to learn the hard way that violence breeds violence. (CC)

We are ill-informed on the fulfillment of this prophecy in post-586 Judah. But we probably get a good glimpse of the chaos and anarchy of the times in the events recorded in Jeremiah 40–43, for example, the assassination of Gedaliah by Ishmael and Jeremiah’s own forcible removal to Egypt at the hands of Johanan’s band. And yet once more, the people will be forced, however reluctantly, to acknowledge Yahweh’s righteousness in bringing their own sins down on their heads (“then you will know that I am Yahweh” [Ezek 12:20]). (CC)

**12:21-14:11** One might well ask whether a new chapter should begin at 12:21. If so, it might well extend through 14:11, since this entire section addresses (in one way or another) the question of true versus false prophecy, and sometimes more specifically, the people’s challenges to the validity of Ezekiel’s own ministry—a perennial challenge faced by all ministers of the Gospel (e.g., St. Paul in Galatians 1–2). (CC)

**12:22** *proverb.* A mocking proverb (probably coined by false prophets; see ch. 13; Jer 23:9–40; 28), which had become a popular saying. (CSB)

 *vision.* The Hebrew for this word is not the same as that used in 1:1 but is the one used in 7:26, referring to a message that could be written down (see Hab 2:2, “revelation”)—specifically Ezekiel’s oracles of judgment. (CSB)

Ezek 12:22 and 12:27 record two popular ways in which Israelites discounted Ezekiel’s prophecies, and which scoffers (ancient and modern) could use to dismiss all true prophecy, since both evasions are perennial. The first one had been distilled into a common saying or proverbial slogan: “The days go by, and every vision fails” (12:22). It reasoned, based on the (often) long interval between a prophecy and its fulfillment, that the prophecy would never come to pass, and hence had not been valid to begin with. The saying was probably targeted at Ezekiel’s earlier prophecies of judgment, although Jeremiah had made many similar prophecies and had encountered similar skepticism (see Jer 5:12; 17:15). But the formulation here in Ezekiel suggests that the intent was to cast doubt about the validity of all prophecy; “every vision” included verbal as well as visual revelation (see the last textual note on 12:22). (CC)

In the eighth century, Isaiah had countered the people’s unbelief in the efficacy of God’s Word (Is 55:10–11). Even if that prophecy had persuaded the Israelites in general, in time their confidence in the efficacy of the Word apparently weakened, faded, and ultimately dissipated. In any case, Ezekiel’s audience could assert that he had (so far) failed one of the tests of a true prophet (Deut 18:22): his prophecies had not come true. Since the date is ca. 592–591 b.c., the fall of Jerusalem is a good four years later. (CC)

**12:23** *every vision will be fulfilled.* Divine affirmation of the true prophetic word (cf. Isa 55:11). (CSB)

God counters by recasting the first proverb. Instead of “the days *go by*” in the popular proverb (12:22; the imperfect יַאַרְכוּ implies indefinite duration), Yahweh asserts, “The days *are near*” (12:23; the perfect form of קָרְבוּ implies imminence and reinforces the meaning of the verb itself). Again, instead of “every vision *fails/perishes*” (אָבַד, 12:22) in the proverb, God speaks of “the fulfillment of every vision” (12:23). “Every” probably intends to generalize again: God’s Word *never* fails (e.g., Is 40:8; 55:11). (CC)

**12:24** NO MORE FALSE…FLATERING – The popular proverb will go out of use when the judgment finally comes, because it will prove that Ezekiel’s prophecies have not been false or empty (never to be fulfilled), but true and full of God’s truth (as proven by their fulfillment). The prophecies that the populace had dismissed were prophecies of woe. But the phrases used in this verse (“vacuous vision,” “misleading divination”) characterize false prophecies of weal (welfare, peace, victory, success). For that reason חָלָק (“slippery; misleading”) is commonly translated as “flattering,” as endorsed by some modern commentators. That false prophecy in general will cease may well be implied too; that theme will be taken up in chapter 13. But the major thrust here is on the cessation of false prophecies that Jerusalem will be spared from destruction and that Israel’s deliverance is just around the corner. (CC)

**12:25** I THE LORD…SHALL BE FULFILLED – The basis of Yahweh’s counterproverb and the nullification of all false prophecy is anchored in Yahweh’s own person: “For I am Yahweh.” That same self-introduction formula punctuates many Mosaic regulations, especially in Leviticus 17–26, sometimes referred to as Israel’s “Holiness Code” (a label that can be salutary without its original critical baggage), which has so many affinities with Ezekiel’s language and theology. Anyone who knows what the name “Yahweh” signifies will understand that certain things necessarily follow from his person and name. Christians simply “recycle” that confession by use of the name “Jesus” (the Christ). Compare the early Christian creed “Jesus is Lord,” that is, “Jesus is Yahweh” in 1 Cor 12:3. (CC)

Yahweh’s assertion “I will speak the word I will speak, and it will be fulfilled” (Ezek 12:25) does not accent God’s ability to speak arbitrarily as he wishes, but in the context, it clearly accents the totality of his speech. He is not divided against himself and does not contradict himself. Everything he says—all his words—will be accomplished. This assertion of the efficacy and power of his Word is in obvious answer to the agnosticism referred to in 12:22, namely, that all prophecy is worthless or not trustworthy. (CC)

As 12:28 will accent again, the fulfillment (of judgment!) is at hand. The facts of history clearly show that this was, indeed, so—regardless of precisely when this undated oracle was uttered. The fulfillment in the face of the people’s refusal to listen will be the ultimate confirmation that they really are no longer the “house of Israel” (12:24) but a “rebellious house” (12:25), as they had repeatedly been addressed earlier (e.g., 2:5–6; 3:27; 12:2). As if any further confirmation were needed, this section (12:21–25), like the next, closes with the divine imprimatur that is especially common in the prophets: “… says the Lord Yahweh.” (CC)

**12:27** *many years from now.* Whereas the first proverb denies that Ezekiel’s words would ever be fulfilled, this one allows that they might be fulfilled in the distant future, beyond the concern of the present generation. (CSB)

Again God calls the prophet’s attention to a common sentiment, this time apparently circulating among the exiles themselves and apparently in specific disregard of Ezekiel: “The vision that he is seeing is for many days [ahead], and for distant times he is prophesying.” This attitude is less skeptical than the previous one, but since its import is so similar, God’s response is brief and virtually identical to the refutation of the proverb in 12:21–25. (CC)

The Israelites’ objection resonates in every age, in our own certainly no less than in previous ones. Scholars and theologians, as well as skeptical laypeople, may not actually deny biblical eschatology, but consign it to so distant a future that, for all practical purposes, they feel they can ignore it safely. It is a truism that often in works of Christian theology, the “last things” not only come last in the book(s), but also are given very cursory treatment because time is running out (no pun intended!). Although 12:27–28 is about collective Israel, the truism certainly applies to individuals and personal eschatology, that is, each person’s death and eternal welfare. The delay of Christ’s parousia allowed cynics to confront the early church with a theology that seemed to be a combination of that in Ezek 12:22 and 12:27, as 2 Pet 3:3–13 makes clear. Today even Christians can lapse into thinking that the “delay” of two millennia means that the promise of Christ’s return is so indefinite that it is all but irrelevant. (CC))

**12:28** DELAYED ANY LONGER – In Ezekiel’s own circumstances, God not only reaffirms Ezekiel’s credentials as a true prophet but avers once again that there will be no long delay. In that case, the verdict of “history” has long since been rendered, since Jerusalem fell about five years later, in 586 b.c. (CC)

We have no warrant to prepare any eschatological timetable (Mk 13:32), but the admonition spoken by Christ and his apostles for us always to watch (e.g., Mt 25:13) and be ready (e.g., Mt 24:44) is ever relevant. The eschatological future dare not be collapsed into the existential present. At the same time, we live every day *sub specie aeternitatis*, aware that the present moment has its place in God’s eternal plan. We live in the time between the times, between what we temporally bound creatures describe as our Lord’s first and second comings. But in the larger scope of biblical thought, we are just like Ezekiel in that we are part of the true “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), living by faith, knowing that the time of judgment is imminent, but so is the consummation of the ages. And God’s “time” is not ours. (CC)