

EZEKIEL

Chapter 12

Judah's Captivity Symbolized

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house. 3 As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile’s baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. 4 You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. 5 In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it. 6 In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.” 7 And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands. I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight. 8 In the morning the word of the LORD came to me: 9 “Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’ 10 Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.’ 11 Say, ‘I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.’ 12 And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes. 13 And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. 14 And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. 15 And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries. 16 But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the LORD.” 17 And the word of the LORD came to me: 18 “Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling and with anxiety. 19 And say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay. In this way her land will be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who dwell in it. 20 And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the LORD.” 21 And the word of the LORD came to me: 22 “Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing’? 23 Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.’ But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I am the LORD; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord GOD.” 26 And the word of the LORD came to me: 27 “Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’ 28 Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord GOD.”

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)

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 This formula, emphasizing that what follows is God’s Word, not man’s, will be repeated several times in the chapter. (TLSB)

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

12:3–20 Two major action prophecies appear in this chapter (vv 3–16 and 17–20), the first since ch 5. They appear to be directed more to those in Jerusalem than to Ezekiel’s immediate audience, which has already been exiled. (TLSB)

12:3 *prepare for yourself an exile’s baggage.* 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. (CSB)

Basic necessities that exiles could gather before the long trip ahead. Ancient reliefs often depict lines of captives with knapsacks slung over their shoulders. (TLSB)

your place to another place. From Ezekiel’s own dwelling to other places. (TLSB)

in their sight. Ezekiel is to perform the action (emphasized seven times in vv 3–7). (TLSB)

12:4 *at evening.* Avoiding the daytime heat. (TLSB)

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)

Houses in that part of the world were (and often still are) made of mud brick. If this was to be done in the people’s sight, Ezekiel must have dug from the outside in and then retrieved his baggage. (TLSB)

12:6 *cover your face.* Implies losing sight of the homeland in exile. This need not mean blindfolding. (TLSB)

Israel. Here, synonymous with Judah. (TLSB)

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

12:7 Ezekiel rarely reports his obedience to God's commands (cf 24:18; 37:7), but here it needs to be emphasized. He had dug through the wall with his own hands, not the easiest of tasks. (TLSB)

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 *In the morning.* After Ezekiel "did as ... commanded" (v. 7). Again the divine explanation follows the prophet's unquestioning obedience. (CSB)

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

Ezekiel has gotten his audience's attention, which gives him an opportunity to explain the action prophecy they have just witnessed. (TLSB)

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

Zedekiah, the puppet the Babylonians had placed over Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, the legitimate king, had been exiled together with Ezekiel. Cf 2Ki 24–25. (TLSB)

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)

12:11 The significance of Ezekiel's action (cf v 6) is now made clear. All of them will go into exile—precisely what they refuse to believe. (TLSB)

12:12 *prince ... shall lift his baggage.* The prince and the populace are treated virtually as a unit. The prince will be forced to carry his own baggage (v 3) as Ezekiel has done and to abandon his homeland. (TLSB)

12:13 *My net ... My snare.* Metaphors to emphasize God's control over the capture of the prince, in spite of his attempts to escape. (TLSB)

Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans. The first time Ezekiel uses the name Babylon. Years earlier, Babylon had been politically important under the Amorites, but by Ezekiel's time it was ruled by Aramaic-speaking Chaldeans (cf 1:3; 11:24). The details of the fulfillment of this prophecy are recorded in 2Ki 25:4–7; Jer 52:7–11. (TLSB)

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

12:14 *toward every wind.* Beginning of Jewish Diaspora (Dispersion), a situation evidenced in St Paul's later missionary journeys. Cf Ac 13–20. (TLSB)

helpers ... troops. King's supporters. Babylon deported the bulk of the survivors of the sack of Jerusalem; others were scattered. (TLSB)

the sword. Cf Ezk 5:2, 12. (TLSB)

12:15 *they shall know that I am the LORD.* Does not necessarily imply repentance, but the admission, however grudging, that the Lord is in control. (TLSB)

when I disperse them. Cf v 14. (TLSB)

12:16 *declare all their abominations.* Gospel theme of a remnant escaping is hinted at here. The few who survive can testify to the Gentiles that their plight was not the result of God's weakness but of His just punishment for their many abominations. (TLSB)

12:17–20 Brief but powerful second action prophecy. (TLSB)

12:18 *eat your bread with quaking...water with trembling.* 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)

Picture of uncontrollable fright in connection with the fall of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

12:19 Apparently, the people remain so convinced that Jerusalem could never fall, that Ezekiel must explain his actions to them. (TLSB)

violence. Summarizes the social aspects of their apostasy.

12:20 Almost total depopulation of the land (not only Jerusalem) is described. The language harks back to the covenant curses in Lv 26:14–26. (TLSB)

12:22–28 God commands Ezekiel to refute complaints by which the people were discounting his prophecies. This indicates that Ezekiel was being heard, but not believed. (TLSB)

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)

Popular saying. (TLSB)

The days grow long. Day after day goes by without anything significant happening. (TLSB)

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)

They complained that prophecies go unfulfilled. (TLSB)

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

God's rejoinder to the popular "proverb" is a direct contradiction of it. (TLSB)

12:24 *false.* Lit, "vain." Cf Ex 23:1; Ps 12:3; 24:4; 41:7; 144:8; Pr 30:8. (TLSB)

false vision or flattering divination. What the audience wants to hear, inflating the high opinion they have of themselves. This implies the cessation of false prophecy, which was apparently encouraging the people's skepticism. (TLSB)

12:25 *Speak the word ... and it will be performed.* Ezekiel's refutation is anchored in the certainty of the fulfillment of God's Word. (TLSB)

12:27–28 A repetition of vv 22–25 in different words. The problem Ezekiel was confronting is a perennial one (cf 2Pt 3:3–13). Because Christ's second coming has been delayed for two thousand years, many weak believers scarcely give it a thought. The Bible closes with Christ's assurance, "Surely I am coming soon" (Rv 22:20), but God's time is not our time (2Pt 3:8). (TLSB)

12:27 *many days 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)

Ch 12 Two action prophecies forecast the forthcoming deportation after Jerusalem's fall and its attendant horrors, followed by refutations of two complaints the people are using to discount God's warnings. Yet, God's overarching purpose in judgment is to bring forth repentance and create trust in His salvation, offered freely in Christ's death and resurrection. • Lord, keep us ever mindful of our sinfulness. United by Baptism with Christ's death and resurrection and through Word and Sacrament, keep us firm in the faith until the day of our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)