

EZEKIEL

Chapter 24

The Siege of Jerusalem

In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. 3 And utter a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: “Set on the pot, set it on; pour in water also; 4 put in it the pieces of meat, all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones. 5 Take the choicest one of the flock; pile the logs under it; boil it well; seethe also its bones in it. 6 “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose corrosion is in it, and whose corrosion has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making any choice. 7 For the blood she has shed is in her midst; she put it on the bare rock; she did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with dust. 8 To rouse my wrath, to take vengeance, I have set on the bare rock the blood she has shed, that it may not be covered. 9 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great. 10 Heap on the logs, kindle the fire, boil the meat well, mix in the spices, and let the bones be burned up. 11 Then set it empty upon the coals, that it may become hot, and its copper may burn, that its uncleanness may be melted in it, its corrosion consumed. 12 She has wearied herself with toil; its abundant corrosion does not go out of it. Into the fire with its corrosion! 13 On account of your unclean lewdness, because I would have cleansed you and you were not cleansed from your uncleanness, you shall not be cleansed anymore till I have satisfied my fury upon you. 14 I am the LORD. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord GOD.”

By almost any reckoning, this is a central and pivotal chapter in the book of Ezekiel. By what is probably only a happy coincidence, by chapter count it is also the midpoint of the book (although if we count verses, we have to wait until the end of chapter 25. (CC)

The chapter climaxes and in many ways summarizes everything Ezekiel has been preaching in especially the previous twelve chapters: the fatuity of the people’s illusions that Jerusalem is secure. But the time of reckoning has come. The chapter turns on two fateful days: the beginning of the siege of the city, announced in 24:1, and an anticipation of its fall, which would take place two and a half years later, although its fall is not recorded until 33:21. (CC)

Structurally, the chapter divides into two discrete sections: (1) a לִּפְתָּיִךְ, “parable” (24:3), of a cooking pot and its application (24:1–14) and (2) the action prophecy of Ezekiel’s strange behavior when his wife dies and what it portends. (CC)

24:1–14 For four years (cf 1:2; 24:1), God’s appointed watchman over Israel sounded the alarm in vain (3:7). Informed by “the word of the LORD,” he announces that, as he now speaks, the king of Babylon is no longer in far-off Riblah but “has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day” (24:1–2). (TLSB)

4:1 *ninth year ... tenth month ... tenth day.* Jan. 15, 588 B.C.; Ezekiel’s fourth date (see 1:2; 8:1; 20:1). (CSB)

Jan 15, 588 BC, the ninth year of the exile. Cf 1:1–2; 8:1; 2Ki 25:1; Jer 52:4. After the exile, the day was observed annually by fasting (Zec 8:19). (TLSB)

The date when the siege of Jerusalem commenced is not formulated in Ezekiel's usual way. Remarkably, the two other records of this date in the OT (2 Ki 25:1; Jer 52:4) are formulated in almost the identical wording used by Ezekiel. On our modern, Western calendar, this date probably was around January 15, 588. Ezekiel records this date at a time when neither he nor his fellow exiles could possibly know about the events in Judah apart from divine revelation. (CC)

24:2 *write...this very day.* God revealed to Ezekiel what was happening in Jerusalem. (CSB)

In very careful language, Ezekiel is literally commanded to record the "name" of the day: "the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem on this very day." The beginning of the siege of Jerusalem was the beginning of the end for the politico-theological system begun by David and Solomon. When word would come nearly two years later of the city's fall, the reports of the few survivors would be found to match the prophet's prediction. Not only would that authenticate him as a true prophet to an unbelieving audience (cf. Deut 18:21–22), but in the meantime, it would give a sense of urgency to the prophet's preaching. Time was running out, not only in the general sense that one never knows the day or the hour (cf. Mt 24:36; 25:13) of future events, but in this pivotal moment in the history of God's people. The repeated "this very day" indicates that what follows is the culmination and fulfillment of all the prophecies of judgment in chapters 4–23. (CC)

24:3–5 The pieces of meat represent the people of Jerusalem. The upper stratum of the citizenry will share the same fate as the rank and file. In order to make sure that the bones too are thoroughly boiled, they are to be placed under the meat and the water is to be brought to a high boiling point. (TLSB)

24:3 *rebellious house.* The last occurrence of this condemning phrase in Ezekiel (see 2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26–27; 12:2–3, 9, 25; 17:12). Jerusalem's rebellion would soon be crushed. (CSB)

pot. The image of 11:3–12, a discussion of the remnant, here pictures total destruction. The cooking pot is Jerusalem (cf. 11:3). (CSB)

24:4 *good pieces.* The people of Jerusalem who thought they were spared the exile in 597 B.C. because of their goodness. (CSB)

24:5 *logs.* Nebuchadnezzar's siege equipment. (CSB)

24:6 *corrosion.* Representing Jerusalem's irredeemable situation. (CSB)

Copper pot has oxidized and was not cleaned, spoiling the food. (TLSB)

Since the city is still full of "filth," that is, impurity and godlessness, the cuts of meat (the inhabitants of the city) will have to be removed one by one, or the city will never be purged. The implication is a frontal challenge to the people's perception of their status before God. Far from being choice cuts that would surely be saved, the residents of the city are stinking, rotten meat that must be charred and discarded. (CC)

without making any choice. After the siege of Jerusalem in 597, perhaps the Babylonians had cast lots to see whom they would take away into exile. Now everyone would go. (CSB)

Stabbing and removing meat at random—all get treated the same. (TLSB)

My understanding is that no one in the city will be given any choice. No “lot” will consign only some to death and/or exile, while sparing others; all will, in effect, experience the same judgment. Since all are complicit in the same apostasy, all will suffer the same fate. There will be no need to cast lots to determine guilt (as in Joshua 7), because all have flaunted their blood guilt for all to see. All the meat in the pot is so rotten that no one will be interested in salvaging even a piece. (CC)

24:7 *blood ... on the bare rock.* Jerusalem had brazenly left on display the blood she unjustly shed (cf. Isa 3:9). For uncovered blood see Ge 4:10; Job 16:18; Isa 26:21. (CSB)

Blood was shed so brazenly and openly that no attempt was made to cover the crime or to bring the murderer to justice. Therefore the blood, like Abel’s, cries to God for vengeance (cf Gn 4:10; Jb 16:18; Ps 32:1; Is 26:21; Rm 4:7). (TLSB)

“The blood she shed” is a semi-interpretative translation, since the Hebrew simply has “her blood is in her midst.” Israel had many laws pertaining to blood, all centering on the understanding that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11) and explaining why blood played such a central role in sacrificial contexts of atonement and communion, as it still does in its Christian antitype, the Lord’s Supper. (CC)

24:8 *wrath.* God’s wrath. What Jerusalem had begun (v. 7), God would complete through judgment. Compare Ex 8:32 with Ex 9:12. (CSB)

This is the first time that this oracle explicitly speaks of Yahweh’s response to Jerusalem’s sins. The verse forms a transition to the following verses, which will accent the wrath of Yahweh’s judgment. (CC)

24:9 *bloody city!* Not because of her godly sacrifices at her temple, but because of her heinous sacrifice of firstborn children to foreign gods. (TLSB)

24:10 Keep cooking as though nothing were wrong. (TLSB)

24:12 *wearied herself.* Also translated “she has wearied Me.” The thought is that God’s previous chastisements were wasted efforts because they failed to produce repentance and so cleanse the city of her filthy lewdness (v 13). (TLSB)

24:14 *I will do it.* God will allow the Babylonians to complete the siege. (TLSB)

24:1–14 By God’s own hand, the Babylonians besiege Jerusalem (v 2). Judah’s offenses against God earn her the hideous title of “the bloody city” (v 6). God sets afire Judah’s uncleanness (v 11). This cleansing fire subsides when God has satisfied His fury (v 13). Thanks be to God; for our sakes, Jesus satisfied God’s fury on the cross and atoned for all our uncleanness with His precious blood. • Father, only the precious blood of Jesus makes us holy. Purify us from all unrighteousness for His sake. Amen. (TLSB)

Ezekiel's Wife Dies

15 The word of the LORD came to me: **16** “Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. **17** Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.” **18** So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded. **19** And the people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting thus?” **20** Then I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me: **21** ‘Say to the house of

Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. 22 And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. 23 Your turbans shall be on your heads and your shoes on your feet; you shall not mourn or weep, but you shall rot away in your iniquities and groan to one another. 24 Thus shall Ezekiel be to you a sign; according to all that he has done you shall do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’ 25 “As for you, son of man, surely on the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their soul’s desire, and also their sons and daughters, 26 on that day a fugitive will come to you to report to you the news. 27 On that day your mouth will be opened to the fugitive, and you shall speak and be no longer mute. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.”

24:15–27 Ezekiel was directed to perform another action prophecy (see note, chs 4–5). This is likely the most difficult assignment he received. (TLSB)

24:16 *a stroke*. Some swiftly fatal disease, one that often reached plague proportions (see Ex 9:14; Nu 14:37). (CSB)

delight of your eyes.† The object of loving attention (see vv. 21, 25). (CSB)

Contrary to appearances, Ezekiel was not devoid of tender love, as this term of endearment for his wife shows. (TLSB)

you shall not mourn. He was to give no outward expression of his grief and to refrain from observing the customary mourning rites. His highly unconventional behavior prompted the people to ask what these things meant. (TLSB)

24:17 *Sigh*. According to prevailing funeral customs, the mourner was expected to (1) engage women to lament aloud (Mk 5:38); (2) take off the turban and go barefoot (2Sm 15:30; Is 20:2); (3) pull down a head-covering over his face to his lips (Mi 3:7); and (4) eat “the bread of men,” prepared by relatives and friends (Jer 16:7; Hos 9:4). (TLSB)

bind on your turban. The mourner normally removed it and put dust on his head (see Jos 7:6; 1Sa 4:12). (CSB)

shoes on your feet. To remove them showed grief (see 2Sa 15:30). (CSB)

cover your lips. A gesture of shame (Mic 3:7) or uncleanness (Lev 13:45). (CSB)

eat the bread of men. The funeral meal (see Jer 16:7). (CSB)

In general, Ezekiel’s action prophecies are relatively typical of the genre by being dramatized or acted out. That remains true of his avoidance of the customary behaviors and rituals of mourning, as prescribed in this verse. These actions generally were socially much more rigid and prescribed in traditional societies such as Israel and other societies in antiquity. Even so thoroughly non-traditional a culture as ours has not completely dropped a variety of mourning customs. (CC)

24:19 *the people said to me*. The third time that the people responded to Ezekiel’s behavior (see 12:9; 21:7). (CSB)

Not surprisingly, the people surmise that such weird behavior must have some significance. It is surely no accident that they do not merely ask about the sign's meaning in general, but what it means "for us." God has providentially caused them to accord the prophet more respect than ever before. God has disposed them to actually listen to his message more intently than on any earlier occasion, at least so far as we can tell (contrast 12:27; 20:49). (CC)

24:21 *profane*. By letting Nebuchadnezzar burn it down. (CSB)

The gravity of the message contained in the answer is underscored by introducing it with a triad of prophetic formulae, two of which ("the Word of Yahweh came to me" and "thus says the Lord Yahweh") emphasize the divine origin of the reply. The answer is as blunt as it is devastating. (CC)

the pride of your power. Cf Ps 27:4; 137:6; Lm 2:4. (TLSB)

24:24 *Ezekiel*. The prophet speaks of himself in the third person. Elsewhere his name occurs only in 1:3. (CSB)

24:25 *their stronghold*. The temple. (TLSB)

24:26 *on that day*. Hbr idiom also translated "when" or "then." Ezekiel is not saying that a fugitive leaving Jerusalem on the day of its capture (v 25) could arrive in Babylon within 24 hours. In prophetic perspective, the tragic event and the arrival of the report are telescoped into a single view. (TLSB)

fugitive. The first of the exiles of 586 B.C. (CSB)

Someone would escape the destruction to share the news. (TLSB)

news. About the siege—its beginning (verifying the accuracy of vv. 1–2) and its ending. (CSB)

24:27 *no longer be silent*. Ezekiel's wife died the same day the temple was burned (Aug. 14, 586 B.C.; see 2Ki 25:8–9). (CSB)

no longer mute. Cf 33:22. On the nature of the prophet's temporary muteness. (TLSB)

24:15–27 Ezekiel must hold in his sorrow over the death of his wife as a sign to the exiles that they have no right to mourn over the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. False tears offend God. He calls for true sorrow and contrition as genuine results of repentance. Our sins profaned His most glorious temple—the body and life of His Son. Yet the Father quietly gave Him over to death so that we might have life. Thankfully, Jesus cleanses our pain-filled hearts and will wipe away all our tears. • O Jesus, when our sin profaned the temple of Your body, You prepared for us a place in Your eternal glory. Return and deliver us. Amen. (TLSB)