

EZEKIEL

Chapter 6

Judgment Against Idolatry

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, 3 and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. 4 Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols. 5 And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. 6 Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste and the high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense altars cut down, and your works wiped out. 7 And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD. “Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, 9 then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. 10 And they shall know that I am the LORD. I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.” 11 Thus says the Lord GOD: “Clap your hands and stamp your foot and say, Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, for they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. 12 He who is far off shall die of pestilence, and he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who is left and is preserved shall die of famine. Thus I will spend my fury upon them. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak, wherever they offered pleasing aroma to all their idols. 14 And I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land desolate and waste, in all their dwelling places, from the wilderness to Riblah. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

Ch 6 Consists of two oracles (vv 2–10, 11–14), each of which subdivides into a main section (vv 2–7, 11–13a) followed by a sort of echo (vv 8–10, 13b–14). Both major sections close with variations of the recognition formula (see note, 2:5). (TLSB)

6:1 *The word of the LORD came to me.* Formula emphasizing that what follows is not human thought but a product of divine revelation. (TLSB)

6:2 *set your face toward.* The Lord commands an action prophecy. (TLSB)

the mountains of Israel. Phrase Ezekiel uses 16 times; used by no other prophet. Several factors are involved: (1) nostalgia for the hilly land of Israel is held in contrast to relatively flat terrain of lower Mesopotamia; (2) Ezekiel expands his scope from besieged Jerusalem (chs 3–5) to the whole land of Israel; and (3) the mountains were often centers of pagan worship (see p 526). A sequel comes in ch 36, describing Israel’s return to the mountains of Israel in a faithful age. (TLSB)

6:3 *high places.* Open-air sanctuaries of Canaanite origin, condemned throughout the OT. The high places, together with the “altars,” “incense altars” and “idols” (v. 4), make up a list of four objects – (“Four,” which stands for completeness (cf. the four directions in Ge 13:14 and the four quarters of the earth in Isa 11:12), is used often in this chapter—and over 40 times in the book. The living creatures,

called “cherubim” in ch. 10, are throne attendants, here (see v. 10) representing God’s creation: “man,” God’s ordained ruler of creation (see Ge 1:26–28; Ps 8); “lion,” the strongest of the wild beasts; “ox,” the most powerful of the domesticated animals; “eagle,” the mightiest of the birds. These four creatures appear again in Rev 4:7 and often are seen in the paintings and sculpture of the Middle Ages, where they represent the four Gospels.) (CSB)

Only Hezekiah and Josiah are credited with reforms thorough enough to abolish the high places. But their successors reversed their achievements, and in Ezekiel’s day the high places were flourishing. (TLSB)

6:4 *altars*. Larger structures, primarily for animal sacrifices. (TLSB)

incense altars. Made of burnt clay, about two feet high, usually inscribed with animal figures and idols of Canaanite gods. (CSB)

Smaller structures. Archaeologists find little four-horned limestone altars in abundance. (TLSB)

idols. The Hebrew for this word is a derisive term (lit. “dung pellets”), used especially by Ezekiel (38 times, as opposed to only 9 times elsewhere in the OT). (CSB)

6:5 To remain unburied was a great shame. Cf Jer 7:33; 16:4. Instead of kneeling or prostrating themselves, as worshipers normally would, the dead Israelite bodies would lie motionless before their “dead” idols. (TLSB)

6:6 *Wherever you dwell*. There judgment will happen. (TLSB)

works wiped out. All efforts to please false gods will end in failure. (TLSB)

The last clause in Ezek 6:6 summarizes the entire chapter (and much of the rest of the first half of Ezekiel): “your works [עֲשֵׂי־יָדַיִךְ] (will be) wiped out.” “Works” is a very generic noun (as is the verb “work”), but the Hebrew word frequently has connotations of whatever people make or do in disregard for and defiance of the true God. For example, the account in 1 Ki 12:28–33 of the construction of the pagan temples in Dan and Bethel by Jeroboam I and his liturgical innovations contrary to the OT divine service repeatedly uses the verb עָשָׂה (“he made”). In Isaiah the verb and its derived nouns are used of men’s apostate cultic inventions (e.g., Is 2:8, 20). In many instances in the Bible, “(all) the works of their hands” or a similar phrase (e.g., 2 Ki 22:17; 2 Chr 34:25; Acts 7:41; Rev 9:20) refers to infractions against the First Commandment (see עָשָׂה in Ex 20:4, 23). Today the phrase applies just as easily to technology or other forms of “fine idolatry.” Against all such works, biblical theology proclaims salvation *sola gratia*, “by grace alone,” not by human “works” presumed to be meritorious, much less by “works” of idolatry or the occult. (CC)

6:7 The result of divine judgment is that “you will know that I am Yahweh” (6:7). This so-called “recognition formula” characteristically comes at the end of Ezekiel’s oracles or sections. It is repeated (in various forms) in 6:7, 10, 13, 14 and occurs close to sixty times in the book. It refers to knowing and confessing that Yahweh both speaks and fulfills his Word—a faith-based recognition of his basic character and the consequences for all who believe or disbelieve. Repeatedly after commands in the Pentateuch (e.g., Leviticus 18), we meet simply, “I am Yahweh.” The very name implies, among other things, his sovereign power, holiness, and power to save. (CC)

The obedience of God’s people does not require them first to authenticate his claims by their own reason or experience. Rather, obedience simply follows faith: alignment with Yahweh’s own character takes place as he works through his Word and sacramental means of grace. In Ezekiel’s context, the accent is

on Yahweh's omnipotent power to punish and to rescue. Yahweh's nature is more fully revealed in the NT by his incarnation in Jesus Christ, but the nature of the believers' relationship to the triune God remains the same in both Testaments (*sola gratia* and *sola fide*). All circumcised Israelites were incorporated into the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. ... And if you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:27, 29). (CC)

6:8 *I will leave some of you alive.* The first time Ezekiel proclaims God's mercy. This theme surfaces again, each time in more detail, until after Jerusalem falls. In chs 34–48, God's mercy becomes the overriding theme. (TLSB)

In a partial digression, Yahweh for the first time in Ezekiel broaches the idea of the "remnant," although he had hinted at it in 5:3 by instructing the prophet to hide a few hairs in the folds of his garment. (CC)

The covenant curses in Leviticus 26, which reverberate so strongly in Ezekiel, themselves keep the door open for a converted remnant (Lev 26:40–45). The remnant theme (expressed with a variety of vocabulary) is also prominent in the prophets preceding Ezekiel. Once Ezekiel's earlier prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem are fulfilled, God's restoration of the remnant becomes the overriding theme (Ezekiel 33–48). Even before that, after this passage, each time when the remnant theme resurfaces, it is gradually expanded. The Gospel grows louder. (CC)

6:9 *those of you who escape will remember me.* The corrective outcome God intends from the severe judgment to come (see v. 10). (CSB)

The remnant will have true contrition. (TLSB)

broken. Heartbroken. In the Bible, God is frequently described in human terms as grieving over the way His people have responded to His love with ingratitude (e.g., Ps 78:40; Mi 6:3–4). (TLSB)

heart ... eyes. Should express faithfulness to God; instead, they wander. (TLSB)

loathsome ... abominations. They are poor, miserable sinners. Knowledge of the absolution God offers to the truly penitent is assumed in such a context. The alternative is despair. (TLSB)

6:10 *evil.* Hbr word does not necessarily imply moral infractions as in v 9. When God is the subject, "calamity, disaster" might better reproduce the meaning. (TLSB)

6:11–14 Second, shorter oracle commands Ezekiel to perform an action prophecy (cf v 2). The context first explains God's motives, and then specifies how God's wrath will manifest itself. This second oracle repeats the first (vv 2–10), except that here we only hear of God's certain judgment. (TLSB)

6:11 *Strike your hands together.* A command to Ezekiel, calling for his personal involvement in the tragedy—though Israel's enemies were condemned for the same practice (see 25:6). (CSB)

Mocking actions. (TLSB)

abominations. Expresses the depths of Israelite depravity. (TLSB)

6:12 No one will escape from God's punishment. (TLSB)

pestilence ... sword ... famine. Conventional summary of punishments (5:12, 17; 12:16; 14:21); most common in Jer. They come from the covenant curses of Lv 26:25–26. (Cf 1Ch 21:12.). (TLSB)

6:13 Yahweh emphasizes the comprehensiveness of his judgment, particularly against the high places. The phrases with “every” and “all” may have described the pervasiveness of Israel’s defiant apostasy, but now they describe the universality of God’s judgment. “Where ‘his’ [Yahweh’s] people had gathered to secure the blessing of the gods, there they will be gathered as corpses, heaped up and strewn about in the ultimate act of desecration. Rather than offering life to the devotees, the pagan sanctuaries have become symbols of death.” (CC)

pleasing aroma. Probably a reference to incense, or perhaps to sacrifices of any sort. (TLSB)

6:14 *I will stretch out my hand against.* A common expression in Ezekiel (see 14:9, 13; 16:27; 25:7; 35:3). (CSB)

wilderness. Probably the Negeb, the semi-arid southern part of the land, gradually merging into the great desert of Sinai. (TLSB)

Defines the nation’s northern limit, situated in central Syria, north of Damascus, on the upper Orontes River. It is just a bit south of the city of Hamath, specified elsewhere as the northern limit of the land. Riblah had painful historical associations: Pharaoh Neco (2Ki 23:33) and Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 25:4–7) used Riblah as their campaign headquarters. (TLSB)

Ch 6 The Lord condemns the people, but, for the first time, salvation is clearly declared for the contrite remnant. Because God Himself was brokenhearted at their previous faithlessness, He will remember them now and so fulfill for them His promises, including the promise of the Savior. • O Lord, we are truly by nature sinful and unclean. Bless us with Your Word and Sacraments that we may remember and give genuine thanks for Your forgiveness through the sacrifice of Your Son. Amen. (TLSB)