

Judah's Captivity Portrayed

Ezekiel 12

Ezekiel 12:1-15: *"Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ² '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. ³ '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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it. ⁶ 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.'"*

⁷ *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.*

⁸ *And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 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 burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them.'" ¹¹ 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.' ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.*

¹⁵ *"Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. ¹⁶ 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."*

Background Notes

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel are both known for performing object lessons or dramatic signs to drive home or illustrate their message to the people. This is a valuable lesson for us. We, too, should use illustrations and object lessons in our ministry if it will help people to understand our message better.

Jeremiah preached and prophesied in Jerusalem while Ezekiel was preaching and prophesying in Babylon. Ezekiel was taken as a captive to Babylon in 597 BC, along with other captives from Judah. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonian armies did not take place until 586 BC.

Ezekiel prophesied and ministered through signs, sermons, and visions. In chapters 8-11, we studied Ezekiel's four-part vision about the coming judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. God had to judge them because of their idolatry and wickedness.

From chapter 12 through chapter 24, Ezekiel gave a number of signs, messages, and parables that emphasized the certainty and the causes of the coming judgment. The two signs in Ezekiel 12 were "the sign of the baggage and tunneled wall" and "the sign of the trembling hands."

Doctrinal Points

1. Ezekiel dramatized the fate of King Zedekiah.

In verse 3-6, God told Ezekiel to pack a few of his belongings in a kind of rough sack - the kind of baggage carried by people who were being taken away as captives. Ezekiel was to take this baggage out of his house during the day before the watching people. At evening, he was to dig a hole through the mud brick side of his house while everyone was watching. Then at night, he was to come out of his house through the tunneled hole in the wall and carry his baggage away, blindfolded.

Ezekiel's dramatic sign was an illustration of the plight of many Jews who would try to escape the siege of Jerusalem. They would be caught, and either killed or taken into captivity. The sign especially illustrated the attempted escape of King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (the "prince" in these verses). The siege of Jerusalem and the attempted escape of King Zedekiah was described in Jeremiah 52.

"Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. ⁴ Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. ⁵ So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ⁶ By the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. ⁷ Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled and went out of the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were near the city all around. And they went by way of the plain.

⁸ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. ⁹ So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he pronounced judgment on him. ¹⁰ Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. And he killed all the princes of Judah in Riblah. ¹¹ He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death" (Jeremiah 52:3-11).

Because Nebuchadnezzar blinded Zedekiah, he never saw Babylon, even though he died there as a captive (Ezekiel 12:13). Ezekiel dramatized the fate of King Zedekiah.

2. Ezekiel dramatized the fear of the coming siege.

Ezekiel 12:17-20: *“Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ¹⁸“Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰Then the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall become desolate; and you shall know that I am the Lord.””*

Verses 17-20 record the second sign that Ezekiel was to act out before the people. Back in chapter 4 God told Ezekiel to lie on his side for 430 days. To dramatize the conditions in Jerusalem during the coming siege, he was to eat only a small amount of bread and drink only a small amount of water each day. Now God instructed Ezekiel to eat his bread and drink his ration of water with quaking or trembling hands. I challenge you to imitate this at your family mealtime tonight - you will have an excellent opportunity to share this Bible study with the rest of the family!

The sign of the trembling hands illustrated the fear and trembling that would come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem when the Babylonian army surrounded and besieged them. There would be no escape. Ezekiel dramatized the fear of the coming siege.

Practical Application

Don't let delay turn into doubt or denial.

Ezekiel 12:21-28: *“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ²²“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’? ²³Tell 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. ²⁴For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. ²⁵For 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.”’ ²⁶Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ²⁷“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.’ ²⁸Therefore 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.”’*

Ezekiel followed up this chapter's signs with a series of messages. The first two messages are found in the last section of Ezekiel 12. Both messages dealt with popular proverbs that the people were quoting.

The first proverb is in verse 22: *“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?’”* The people were saying that the predictions of doom by Ezekiel and the other prophets would come to nothing. They denied and doubted the word of the Lord through the prophets. As far as they were concerned, the fact that the predictions had not yet taken place indicated that they would never take place. God answered through Ezekiel, saying that it wouldn't be long before the people would no longer quote that proverb. The prophecies were just about to be fulfilled, and there would be no doubt or denial when the Babylonian army surrounded Jerusalem.

The other proverb is in verse 27: *“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.’”* In other words, the people were saying that the prophecies *might* be fulfilled - but the disaster would be far off in the distant future. They denied and doubted the imminence of the coming judgment. The Lord answered: *“None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done”* (v28). And indeed all the prophecies came true not long thereafter - right down to the very details that were prophesied.

A lot of people today are just like the skeptics of Ezekiel's day. They know the Bible predicts that a day of judgment is coming in the future. However, because the Lord, in His patience, delays the coming judgment, these folks doubt or deny the truth of His coming and His judgment. 2 Peter 3:3-4 speaks about these skeptics: *“Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’”*

This application is just as valuable for believers as it is for unbelievers, and it applies to many of the promises and predictions of Scripture. As Christians, we need to be careful that we don't begin to doubt or deny any promises of the Word of God just because (for example) the Lord chooses to delay His answers to our prayers, or because it seems that His return is “delayed.”

Do you *really* believe that the Lord could come back for His Church *today*? Don't let delay turn into doubt or denial.