

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 12

In this chapter, under the sign of the prophet's removing household goods, is represented the removal of the king of Judah and his people from their own land into captivity; and under another sign, of the prophet's eating and drinking with quaking, and trembling, and carefulness, is set forth, either the famine that should be during the siege of Jerusalem, or the desolations following the taking of it; and the chapter is concluded with a reproof of the Jews flattering themselves that these prophecies respected times a great way off, and therefore hoped they would never be accomplished. The preface to the first sign is in (³⁵²¹Ezekiel 12:1,2); which describes the people of the Jews as rebellious, and given up to judicial blindness and hardness; and suggests the cause of all their calamities: the order to prepare goods for removing, to show to the people; for digging a wall; carrying the stuff out in their sight, on his shoulders, at twilight; and covering his face when he did it, is in (³⁵²³Ezekiel 12:3-6); the execution of this order, which is declared in part for the whole, is in (³⁵²⁷Ezekiel 12:7); then follows the explication of this sign, (³⁵²⁸Ezekiel 12:8-11); and the application of it, first to King Zedekiah, in whom should be fulfilled several of the particulars mentioned, (³⁵²²Ezekiel 12:12,13); and to the people about him, and his army that should be scattered and fall by the sword, (³⁵²⁴Ezekiel 12:14); the end of which should be, that the Lord should be known, his power, truth, and righteousness, by a few that should escape the famine, pestilence, and sword, (³⁵²⁵Ezekiel 12:15,16). The second sign, with the explication and application of it, is in (³⁵²⁷Ezekiel 12:17-20); and the chapter is closed with a reproof of the Jews; the proverbial expression they used, and which the Lord resented, is cited (³⁵²¹Ezekiel 12:21,22); and the prophet is bid to assure them that it should cease, or there should be no room for it; and also every vain vision and flattering divination, (³⁵²³Ezekiel 12:23,24); and that the word of the Lord should not be prolonged, but should quickly and certainly be accomplished; and that their hopes of the contrary were in vain, (³⁵²⁵Ezekiel 12:25-28).

Ver. 1. *The word of the Lord came unto me, saying.*] The word of prophecy, as the Targum; the vision of the cherubim being over, this, very likely, immediately followed upon the former; though the exact time of the prophecy cannot be fixed, because the date is not given; it must be between the sixth month of the sixth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, (²⁰⁰⁸Ezekiel 8:1); and the fifth month of the seventh year, (²⁶⁰⁰Ezekiel 20:1).

Ver. 2. *Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, &c.*] The captives in Babylon, who murmured at their present condition and circumstances, and looked upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to be in happy ones, and believed they would continue in them, as the false prophets persuaded them; not believing the prophets of the Lord; and encouraged them to stand out against the king of Babylon, repenting that they had surrendered to him, and hoped they should by their means be delivered see the same character of them, (²⁰⁰⁸Ezekiel 2:3,5-7 3:9,26);

which have eyes to see, and see not: they have ears to hear, and hear not; they had natural sense and understanding, and means and opportunities of being better informed, and of knowing the true state of things, and how they were, and would be; but they wilfully shut their eyes against all light and evidence, and stopped their ears, and would not hearken to the words of the prophets:

for they [are] a rebellious house; stubborn, obstinate, and self-willed: or, "a house of rebellion"^{f159}.

Ver. 3. *Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, &c.*] Or, "vessels of captivity"^{f160}, such as persons take along with them when they go a journey, or into a far country; such as a staff, scrip, purse, shoes, &c. or household goods; such as tables, chairs, and the like, which are removed when a person goes from one house to another; by which sign they of the captivity were to be taught that Zedekiah and the people of the Jews should in like manner be carried captive into Babylon; which they were not willing to believe, and the false prophets had told them the contrary:

and remove by day in their sight; be carrying the stuff out, day by day, several days running, as Jarchi from Menachem interprets it; that they may see and take notice of it, and ask the reason of it; which, when known, they might send to their correspondents at Jerusalem, and acquaint them with it:

and thou shall remove from thy place to another place in their sight; from the house in which he dwelt, to another house at some distance; yet so as to be seen by them, both from whence and whither he moved:

it may be they will consider; or “see”^{f161}; make use of their eyes, and of their understandings, and think better of things. The Targum is,

“perhaps they will fear;”

the Lord, and regard his prophets, and be afraid of his judgments:

though they [be] a rebellious house; such who are the most obstinate may be reclaimed.

Ver. 4. *Then shall thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight*, &c.] Bring it forth, that they may be spectators of it; and “by day”, that it might be manifest to them what was carried out; and this day by day, till all was removed:

as stuff for removing; that is intended to be removed from one place to another, and is carried away in the daytime, in the view of everyone:

and thou shall go forth at even in their sight; as a man, having removed his goods in the daytime, goes forth himself at evening: this denotes the flight of Zedekiah from Jerusalem in the night, (²³⁰⁴Jeremiah 39:4);

as they that go forth into captivity: with a sorrowful countenance, in a mournful habit, and with airs and gestures showing anger, anxiety, and distress; with a bundle on their shoulders, and a staff in their hands.

Ver. 5. *Dig thou through the wall in their sight*, &c.] The wall of the house where he was, as an emblem of the city of Jerusalem closely besieged, from whence there was no escape but by digging through the wall this showed the manner in which Zedekiah made his escape, by the way of the gate, between the two walls which was by the king’s garden, (²³¹⁷Jeremiah 52:7);

and carry out thereby; not his stuff, as before; but provisions for himself, necessary for his journey or flight; as no doubt Zedekiah and those with him did.

Ver. 6. *In their sight shall thou bear [it] upon [thy] shoulders*, &c.] The bundle, packed up for his use and service, carried out through the wall dug by him. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render it, as if he

himself was to be carried out upon the shoulders of another, thus: “in their sight, upon the shoulders, thou shall be carried”; but the former sense is best:

[and] carry [it] forth in the twilight; signifying the same as before:

thou shall cover thy face, that thou see not the ground; or “land”; not the land of Israel, but the land of Chaldea, where the prophet was: this shows that great shame and confusion which should attend the king of Judah when he fled, and great fear and terror also; and likewise his regard to his eyes being put out by the king of Babylon; so that he saw not the land into which he was carried captive, (²⁴²¹Jeremiah 52:11);

for I have set thee [for] a sign unto the house of Israel; to show unto them by deeds, as well as by words, what should befall them; (see ²¹⁸⁸Isaiah 8:18 20:2-4).

Ver. 7. *And I did so as I was commanded, &c.*] Though it might seem ridiculous in the sight of men, and he be bantered and despised for it; yet, it being the will of God, he was obedient to it; as it becomes the servants of the Lord to be with all readiness and cheerfulness; even in things for which they may be laughed at by others:

I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity; brought his goods out of his house, in order to be had to another place, as a type of the captivity of his countrymen the Jews:

and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; not with an iron instrument, with which walls are dug; but with his hand, he having no such instrument with him, and being in haste, and also that it might be done without noise; denoting the suddenness of Zedekiah’s flight, and the haste he was in; not having time and leisure to take proper instruments with him, he and his men pulled out the stones of the wall with their own hands, and silently made their way through and escaped; (see ³⁴²²Ezekiel 12:12);

I brought [it] forth in the twilight, [and] I bare [it] upon [my] shoulder in their sight: that it might be a sign and emblem of the above things to them, and they might learn some instructions from it.

Ver. 8. *And in the morning came the word of the Lord unto me, saying.*] That is, in the morning after he had done all the above things commanded him; explaining the meaning of them, and showing to whom they belonged.

Ver. 9. *Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, &c.*] The Jews that were in captivity; for with these the prophet was, and before their eyes he had done the above things; and they only could put the following question to him, who were “the rebellious house”; (³¹¹Ezekiel 12:2);

what dost thou? this they put not seriously, as desirous of being informed what was meant by all this; but as deriding the prophet for acting such a weak and silly part: this the Lord knew they had done, and therefore directs the prophet to make a proper answer; though some think the sense is, “hath not the house of Israel said unto thee, what dost thou?” no, they have not; they take no notice of it; never say one word about it, or inquire into the meaning of it; quite careless, thoughtless, and stupid; wherefore, though they will not ask anything concerning it, yet begin with them, and show them the design of it.

Ver. 10. *Say thou unto them, thus saith the Lord God, &c.*] In answer to their sneering question; or notwithstanding their stupidity and indolence, and in order to awaken them out of it:

this burden [concerneth] the prince in Jerusalem; the present reigning prince in Jerusalem, King Zedekiah. The sense is, either that that burden of goods the prophet carried out on his shoulders had a regard to the king of Judah and his captivity, and was an emblem of it; or rather that the burden of prophecy, or that sorrowful calamity predicted by the above sign or type, had relation to that prince, and would be fulfilled in him; and so the Targum,

“upon the prince is the burden of this prophecy;”

in like manner Jarchi interprets it of prophecy:

and all the house of Israel which [are] among them; they were also concerned in it, and would be carried captive with their prince.

Ver. 11. *Say, I [am] your sign, &c.*] Which represents you, and shows what will befall you:

like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them; as he had carried out his stuff, and had removed it from one place to another, so they should be carried away out of their own land into a foreign country, as follows:

they shall remove, [and] go into captivity; the Babylonish captivity.

Ver. 12. *And the prince that [is] among them, &c.]* Zedekiah their king that reigned over them, in whom they trusted, and under whose government they thought themselves safe and secure:

shall bear upon [his] shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth; out of Jerusalem, where his palace and throne were, leaving the main of his riches behind him; only should carry away what he could on his shoulder, a bundle of his most valuable effects, or provisions for his flight: or, as Kimchi and Ben Melech think, his clothes, for lighter march, and more speedy haste:

they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby; it seems by this, that when the king, and his nobles and servants, made their escape, they not only went forth between two walls, but broke through one, in order to get away; which was done, not by the king himself, but by his servants; so the Targum,

“in a wall shall they dig to bring him out by it;”

and therefore the number is changed, not “he”, but “they, shall dig”, &c. though in the following words the singular is again used:

he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with [his] eyes; either through shame at leaving the city, his palace, and all his grandeur. The Targum is,

“he shall cover his face because he hath sinned:”

or that he might not be known and be discovered who he was; and so it was through fear of being betrayed by a false friend, or taken by the enemy: or else this may respect his having his eyes put out at Riblah, so that he could not see with them the land he was carried into; though it rather seems to refer to his first escape out of Jerusalem with a mask or vizor on him, which might hinder his seeing the ground he went upon; and which, in his fright, he could not attend to, looking out here and there, not being able to keep his eye long upon any place. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions, render it, “that he may not be seen with the eye, and he shall not see the land”.

Ver. 13. *My net also will I spread upon him, &c.]* Meaning the Chaldean army, which the Lord raised up, and brought against him, and gave success unto:

and he shall be taken in my snare; as a bird is taken in the snare of the fowler; or a wild beast by the hunter. The Jews have a tradition, which is mentioned both by Jarchi, Kimchi, and Abendana on the place, that there was a cave which reached from Zedekiah's house to the plains of Jericho, by the way of which he fled; and that God prepared a deer, which went upon the top of the cave; and the Chaldeans pursued it; and when it came to the mouth of the cave, Zedekiah was coming out, and they took him:

and I will bring him to Babylon [to] the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it; his eyes being put out at Riblah, (^{2481b}Jeremiah 39:7). The Prophet Jeremiah says that his eyes should behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, (^{2481b}Jeremiah 34:3); and yet here Ezekiel says that he should not see the land of the Chaldeans. Josephus^{f162} observes, that Zedekiah thought these two prophecies contradicted each other, and therefore gave credit to neither; but they both proved true; he saw the king of Babylon at Riblah; but his eyes being there put out, he saw not Babylon, whither he was carried captive:

though he shall die there; as he did, (^{2481b}Jeremiah 52:11).

Ver. 14. *And I will scatter to every wind all that [are] about him to help him, &c.*] Either his bodyguards, the men of war that were with him when he fled, (^{2481b}Jeremiah 52:7); or his auxiliary troops, the Egyptians, whom he had taken into his pay for his assistance:

and all his bands: or "wings"^{f163}; the wings of his army. The Targum interprets it his army; these were all scattered from him when he was taken, (^{2481b}Jeremiah 52:8);

and I will draw out the sword after them: which fled into Egypt, and other countries; so that they did not escape, though they went not into captivity; (see ^{2481b}Ezekiel 5:12).

Ver. 15. *And they shall know that I [am] the Lord, &c.*] God omniscient, and can and do foresee and foretell future events, when the above things shall come to pass; and omnipotent, able to do what he purposed and declared he would; and true and faithful to his word, and holy and righteous in all his ways and works:

when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries; of Egypt, Babylon, Media, and other places.

Ver. 16. *But I will leave a few men of them, &c.*] Or, “men of number”^{f164}; of a small number, such as are easily reckoned up; which will require no great skill in numbers, nor trouble to count them:

from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; during the siege of Jerusalem, and at the breaking of it up; but then they should be carried captive into other countries:

that they may declare all their abominations among the Heathen whither they come; who, observing their calamities, and distresses, would read their sin in their punishment; and conclude they must have been guilty of great enormities, who were punished in such a manner; so that their punishment was a visible and standing declaration to the Heathens of the abominable sins they had been guilty of: or else the end of reserving a few of them from the above capital judgments was, that they being brought to a sense of their sins by their afflictions, might freely confess them, express their repentance for them, and justify God in his proceedings towards them:

and they shall know that I [am] the Lord; not the Heathens, among whom this declaration would be made; but the Jews, brought under a conviction of their sin, and of the justice of God in his dealings with them.

Ver. 17. *Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying.*] Here follows another sign of the desolation of the Jews, which the prophet was unto them; as the former signified their going into captivity, this their famine and distress at the siege of Jerusalem, and the dreadful calamities attending and following that.

Ver. 18. *Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, &c.*] As one in surprise or fear, or that has got an ague upon him:

and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; fearing want of it, or as apprehensive of danger of its being taken away; (see ³⁰¹⁶Ezekiel 4:16).

Ver. 19. *And say unto the people of the land, &c.*] Of Chaldea, where the prophet now was; not the natives of the land, but the Israelites, who were captives in it; who were ready to murmur and repine at their own case, as miserable; and at that of the Jews at Jerusalem, as happy; and therefore they are taught by this sign, as well as by the following prophecy, that they were mistaken:

thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem; or to them, or “concerning” them^{f165}; whom the captives in Chaldea thought lived so happily, and would continue so:

[and] of the land of Israel; or, “upon the land of Israel”^{f166}; inhabitants on it; to this sense the Targum and Septuagint Version interpret it, and also Kimchi:

they shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment; meaning at the siege of Jerusalem, when they could not eat and drink in peace; but, while they were eating and drinking, were disturbed and put into fear and surprise by the besiegers; and also, hearing that their provisions would not hold out, were careful how they ate and drank, and were frightened with the thoughts of being reduced to extreme want:

that her land may be desolate from all that is therein; or, “from its fulness”^{f167}; men and cattle, cities, towns, houses, vineyards, fields, fruits, and plenty of all good things. Jarchi expounds it of riches:

because of the violence of all them that dwell therein; not the violence of the Chaldeans, making a prey of all they met with, plundering cities and towns, and making forage of the fruits of the earth, by which means the land was desolate; but the rapine, oppression, and injustice of the Jews, which were the cause of all these calamities which came upon their country.

Ver. 20. *And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, &c.*] Not only the city of Jerusalem, but the other cities of Judea; as they were by the Chaldeans, which were then full of inhabitants:

and the land shall be desolate; the whole land of Judea be destitute of men and cattle, and lie uncultivated, and become barren and unfruitful:

and ye shall know that I [am] the Lord; who were then captives in Babylon, as well as those who should be dispersed among the nations would; (see ³⁴²⁵Ezekiel 12:15,16).

Ver. 21. *And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.*] After he had been a sign unto the people, in the two instances above mentioned; and they had hardened themselves against the belief of the things signified by them, because the time of their accomplishment was not yet.

Ver. 22. *Son of man, what [is] that proverb [that] ye have in the land of Israel, &c.*] Which question is put, as ignorant of it, but as filled with indignation at the impiety and boldness of those that used it, and in order to expose the wickedness and folly of it:

saying, the days are prolonged; the days of affliction and distress; the time of Jerusalem's destruction, and of the Babylonish captivity, these were not to be of a long time; and therefore they were ready to flatter themselves they would never be, at least in their days; and hence, because judgment was not immediately executed, their hearts were set in them to do evil; and thus they abused the patience and long suffering of God, and they used this and the following expression so often, and so long, that they became proverbial to them:

and every vision faileth? or "perishes"^{f168}; every prophecy comes to nothing; no one is fulfilled; at least because not at, once, therefore they concluded it never would, or, however, hoped it never would; and so pleased themselves, and continued in their impenitence and unbelief, and contempt of prophecy.

Ver. 23. *Tell them therefore, &c.*] Plainly and boldly, with the greatest assurance and confidence, as from God himself:

thus saith the Lord God, I will make this proverb to cease; by quickly accomplishing the things which they, by this proverb, represented as at a great distance, and what would never be brought about:

and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; when the things predicted shall take place:

but say unto them, the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision; the time is hastening on, and will quickly come, when every prophecy shall be fulfilled: it was in the sixth year of Jehoiachin's captivity that these prophecies were delivered out; and in the ninth year Nebuchadnezzar came with his army, and besieged Jerusalem; so that the days were at hand; in three years' time there began an accomplishment of the above predictions, which were scoffed at in the proverb used.

Ver. 24. *For there shall be no more any vain vision, &c.*] Or prophecy; such as the false prophets had given out, that the people should be in peace and safety, and not be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon; which they gave heed to, and so encouraged the lying prophets to go on

prophesying smooth things; when the prophecies of the true prophets were accomplished, then the false ones were rejected, and their prophecies no more regarded; nor could there be any more a place for them, or a reception of them:

nor flattering divination within the house of Israel; the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, read, “in the midst of the children of Israel”; and so the Targum; but Kimchi says, that copies that so read are wrong; and which is confirmed by the Masora, which observes, that the reading is so in all places but in this. The Syriac version renders it “doubtful prediction”; and the Vulgate Latin version, “ambiguous divination”; like the prophecies and answers of the Heathen oracles, which were delivered in terms of doubtful signification, and might be taken in more senses than one. The Septuagint version is, “he that divines for grace”; in order to ingratiate himself into the people, to gain their good will, or their money, or both; and therefore divines smooth things, and flatters them with that which is most agreeable to their inclination; but when they shall see the city taken, and themselves carried captive, they will no more regard such soothing diviners, who pretended from the stars to tell what shall come to pass, as the Arabic version suggests.

Ver. 25. *For I [am] the Lord: I will speak, &c.*] A sovereign Being, immutable and eternal; who will speak by his prophets what is his mind and will shall be done:

and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; the word of prophecy delivered out in his nature by the true prophets never fails, but is always accomplished; as that was which respected the siege or Jerusalem, and captivity of the Jews:

it shall be no more prolonged: the judgment threatened shall be inflicted, and that in a very short time:

for in your days, O rebellious house; while they were living; which they hoped would never be, at least not till after their death; whereas, within live or six years after this, all came to pass:

will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God of hosts; not only the prophecy of their ruin should be given out in their days, but accomplished in that time; which they might depend upon, since he who said it is the mighty God, the Lord of armies in heaven and in earth.

Ver. 26. *Again, the word of the Lord came to me, saying.*] This is repeated to confirm what was before spoken, and that they might assure themselves that there would be a certain and speedy accomplishment of what the Lord had said by his prophet.

Ver. 27. *Son of man, behold, [they of] the house of Israel say, &c.*] Either they of the ten tribes in Babylon, or the Jews in Judea, who were also Israelites: these the Lord directs the prophet to take notice of, and be a witness of what they said; since he himself, as a prophet, was concerned in it:

the vision that he seeth [is] for many days [to come], and he prophesieth of the times [that are] afar off; that is, according to them, the vision that Ezekiel the prophet saw concerning their ruin; and the prophecy which he delivered out relating to that was not to be fulfilled as yet; there were many days and years still to come; it was at a great distance, and so they put away this evil day far from them; they own that he had a vision and prophecy, but it respected future times, and distant ages; and therefore they did not trouble themselves with it; it gave them no great concern, because they considered it as afar off.

Ver. 28. *Therefore say unto them, thus saith the Lord God, &c.*] Carry this message to them from me, whether they will hear it or not; so shall it be:

there shall none of my words be prolonged any more; the fulfilment of prophecies delivered in the name of the Lord by the prophets shall be no longer deferred, but shall quickly be:

but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God: one jot and tittle of it shall not pass away till all be fulfilled; sooner may heaven and earth pass away than that shall; it is for ever settled in heaven, and shall be fulfilled on earth; he that has said it is of one mind, and none can turn him; and is able to do whatsoever he pleases.