

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 5: The Exile's Baggage and False Visions -- Ezekiel 12:1–14:23

Picture a man digging a hole through the wall of his own house in the gray light of evening, while his neighbors stop to stare. He has packed a small bundle, the kind of baggage a refugee carries when there is no time to take more, and now he is crawling out through the breach with his face covered so he cannot see the land he is leaving. He says nothing to explain himself. He just does it, slowly, deliberately, where everyone can watch. This is Ezekiel, and God has told him to act out, in his own body, the exile that is coming on Jerusalem. The people of his day loved a good prophecy as long as it stayed safely in the future. So God gives them a sermon they cannot ignore, a sermon made of moving boxes.

The exiles around Ezekiel had convinced themselves of a comforting lie. Yes, judgment had been spoken, but surely it was for some distant generation, some far-off time that would never touch them. They even had a proverb for it: The days are prolonged, and every vision fails. In other words, the prophets keep warning and nothing ever happens, so why worry. God meets that proverb head-on. None of My words will be delayed any longer, He says. The vision is for your own days, not for some misty horizon. The most dangerous place a person can stand is in the gap between knowing the truth and believing it applies to them right now.

Then the chapters turn to the people who made that gap so wide: the false prophets. They prophesied out of their own hearts and had seen nothing. They cried Peace, peace, when there was no peace. They were like men who build a flimsy wall and then slap whitewash over it so it looks solid and strong, when a single storm will bring the whole thing down. There were false prophetesses too, sewing magic charms and hunting souls, telling lies to people who loved to hear them. It is one of the saddest pictures in Scripture: leaders who should have warned the people instead soothed them right up to the edge of ruin.

At the heart of it all, God exposes the real problem. Certain elders come and sit before Ezekiel as if to seek the LORD, but God says they have set up their idols in their hearts. The trouble was never only the carved images in the temple; it was the images carved into the affections. And God declares something startling: He will answer such a man according to the multitude of his idols. He will let a divided heart have what it has chosen. Even the presence of the most righteous men imaginable, Noah, Daniel, and Job, could not turn away that judgment by their goodness. They would deliver only their own souls. As we walk through these chapters, the question is not whether judgment is coming on someone else. It is whether we have hidden any idol in our own heart, and whether we still believe God means what He says.

Group Discussion: The exiles comforted themselves that the vision was for a far-off time and would never touch their own generation. In what ways do believers today push the warnings of

God's word safely into the future, and how can we guard our hearts against the proverb that says nothing God warns of will really happen to us?

Personal Reflection: God told the elders that they had set up their idols in their hearts. Is there an idol you have carved into your own affections, something you treasure or trust above God, even while you outwardly come to seek Him?

Read Ezekiel 12:1–14:23

Study Questions

1. In Ezekiel 12:1–16 God commands Ezekiel to pack an exile's baggage and dig through the wall as a sign to a rebellious house that has eyes but does not see. What does this sign-act reveal about the certainty of God's judgment and the seriousness of a people who hear the truth yet refuse to perceive it?
2. Ezekiel was told the people have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear (Ezekiel 12:2). Where in your own life are you hearing God's word without truly perceiving it or letting it change how you live?
3. In Ezekiel 12:21–28 God confronts the proverb The days are prolonged, and every vision fails, declaring that none of His words will be delayed any longer. What does this teach about the certainty and timeliness of God's word, and why is it dangerous to assume His warnings apply only to a far-off time?
4. The people assumed God's word concerned a distant future and so felt safe (Ezekiel 12:27). What warnings or commands of God have you quietly filed away as something to deal with later, and what would it mean to take them seriously today?

5. In Ezekiel 13:1–16 God condemns prophets who say Peace when there is no peace and who whitewash a flimsy wall. What does this expose about the danger of false teachers who comfort people in their sin, and how does it underline the duty to speak God's true word even when it is unwelcome?
6. The false prophets cried Peace, peace, when there was no peace (Ezekiel 13:10). When are you tempted to prefer comforting words over true ones, either in what you say to others or in what you long to hear about yourself?
7. In Ezekiel 14:1–11 certain elders come to seek the LORD, yet God says they have set up their idols in their hearts, and He will answer them according to the multitude of their idols. What does it mean that God answers a person according to the idols of his heart, and what does this reveal about the futility of seeking God with a divided heart?
8. God exposed idols that were set up in the heart, not only in the temple (Ezekiel 14:3–5). What competing loyalty have you carried into your worship, and what would genuine repentance toward God look like in that area?
9. In Ezekiel 14:12–23 God declares that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land, their righteousness would deliver only their own souls and not the guilty around them. Drawing the whole passage together, what does this teach about personal accountability before God, the impossibility of borrowing another's righteousness, and how it points us to the one Mediator whose righteousness alone can save?

10. Looking back across these three chapters, name one specific way the God who means every word He speaks and who sees the idols of the heart is calling you to repent and respond this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Ezekiel 18:20, the soul who sins shall die; the son shall not bear the guilt of the father, each one accountable for his own sin, refuting any notion of inherited or borrowed guilt.; Jeremiah 6:13–14, prophets and priests who healed the wound of God's people lightly, saying Peace, peace, when there was no peace.; Matthew 7:24–27, the house built on sand that falls when the storm comes, like the whitewashed wall that cannot stand.; 2 Timothy 4:3–4, people who will not endure sound doctrine but heap up teachers to suit their own desires and turn away from the truth.; 1 Timothy 2:5, there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, whose righteousness alone can save the guilty that no other man's goodness could.

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