

Ezekiel 12B

- We return to our study of the third division of Ezekiel's prophecies
 - As I mentioned last week, in this section we find the rebellious exiles giving excuses for why they should not listen to the prophet's counsel
 - Across 8 chapters will find eight excuses
 - And in response to each excuse, the Lord will give Ezekiel a word for the exiles
 - And I also mentioned that these eight excuses may sound familiar to us
 - There are times in a Christian's life when we may use similar excuses to defend our choice to disobey or ignore God
 - After all, it's human nature to make excuses, even if they aren't very good

Like the man who arrived late for work for the third time in a week. When he walked into his office he found his boss, Mr. Epstein, waiting for him.

The boss asked sarcastically, "What's your reason for being late this time? I hope you have a good excuse for a change."

The man sighed, "Everything went wrong this morning. My wife was supposed to drive me to the ferry this morning, but she didn't set the alarm and we overslept. She got ready in ten minutes and drove me straight to the harbor, but I still missed the ferry."

"So rather than let you down, I swam across the river, ran over the mountain, borrowed a bicycle and cycled the remaining 20 miles through a field to the office."

The boss listened to the man's story, and then without missing a beat, he responded. "Do you really expect me to believe that story? No woman can be ready in ten minutes."

- Our excuses rarely sound as good to others as they do to ourselves...and they *never* sound good to God
 - Last week we studied the first half of chapter 12, where the Lord asked Ezekiel to prepare another charade for the people of Israel
 - Ezekiel was told to pack some belongings, dig a hole in his courtyard wall and pretend to go into exile

- He was depicting what God said was to happen to the remaining Jews living in the city of Jerusalem
- Ezekiel's message to the exiles wasn't news, of course
 - He has told them all this before
 - But because they hadn't listened in the past, the Lord directed Ezekiel to tell them again in this more dramatic fashion
- But after the people saw Ezekiel's display and they heard his explanation concerning its meaning, they simply went on their way
 - They were neither impressed by nor believing in what the prophet foretold
 - But still, something must have stirred in their hearts, because they felt the need to invent a reason to dismiss it
 - So they offered an excuse for why Ezekiel's words weren't worth considering
 - We don't see them sharing their excuse directly with Ezekiel
 - But the Lord has heard their mumblings, and He brings the excuse to the prophet
 - And then the Lord directs Ezekiel how to respond
- Let's look at the excuse first

[Ezek. 12:21](#) Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

[Ezek. 12:22](#) “Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days are long and every vision fails’?”

- The Lord shares with Ezekiel what the Lord has heard the exiles saying about Ezekiel's prophecy
 - The Lord asks, “Son of man, what is this proverb your people have...”
 - The Lord is referring to a cynical saying that circulated within apostate Israel culture even when they were living in the land
 - And now the exiles were repeating it in defense of their unbelief
 - The proverb says “The days are long and every vision fails.”

- It means the things foretold by prophets always turn out to be false because life goes on unchanged
- It's a similar sentiment to what Peter said will be repeated during the last days of our age:

2Pet. 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

2Pet. 3:4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

- Peter says in the last days people will mock the promises of scripture which declare Jesus will return one day and judgment will follow
 - Peter says these mockers also claim that "the days are long"
 - Or as Peter puts it, everything continues just as it was from the beginning
 - They say there will be no end of days, so we have nothing to fear
- That the same sense we find in the exile's proverb
 - They deny a dramatic judgment awaits them
 - And their confidence is based in the fact that no one can remember such a dramatic thing ever happening
- Their cynicism is especially foolish given their circumstances in Babylon
 - These people have already experienced a dramatic upheaval
 - It's not like they're still sitting in Jerusalem scoffing at a prophet declaring their city would one day fall to invaders
 - That's already happened!
 - Ezekiel is simply telling revealing that more of the same is going to happen
 - Yet the exiles comfort themselves with this proverb
- The second half of the proverb is even more absurd
 - They say "every vision fails" meaning the prophets always get it wrong
 - On the one hand, their skepticism is understandable

- False prophets had been victimizing Israel for centuries
- And the people had become accustomed to taking such predictions with a grain of salt
- But here again, their present circumstances in Babylon should have caused them to recognize that not *all* prophets are wrong
 - Jeremiah, the prophet to Jerusalem, told the people their city would fall to Babylon well before it happened
 - Centuries before him, Isaiah foretold that Assyria would conquer the north and it happened
 - Isaiah also alluded to Babylon's capture of Jerusalem
- So, of all people, the exiles in Babylon should have recognized that not all prophets are wrong
 - Only the false ones are wrong
 - Nevertheless, the people blindly assert that prophets can't be trusted
 - So with this proverb, they assure themselves they have nothing to worry about
- Have you ever used this excuse with God? Tell Him that the days are long and His word fails for you?
 - Maybe not in so many words, perhaps, but maybe you've thought something like this:
 - I know God's word says I shouldn't be doing such-and-such, and that sin has consequences...but so far, so good
 - I've avoided disaster to this point, things seem fine so far, I can control this, I can handle it
 - So I can continue to ignore the word of God and it will all work out
 - In essence, that kind of thinking is no different than the proverb spoken by the exiles
 - The commands we find in the word of God directing us into holiness and obedience seem more like suggestions

- Even though God's instructions were intended for our good, to preserve us from the destructive consequences of sin, still we chose to ignore them
- And even when we read warnings in scripture about willful disobedience, we tell ourselves it won't come to pass
- Or we just don't want to think about it, burying our head in the sand
- Ironically, when the Lord is merciful to us by delaying those consequences, we treat his mercy as excuse to continue, like those in Babylon
 - We tell ourselves nothing has happened to us so far, so it will never happen
 - Even though we know others who have experienced consequences under similar circumstances
 - But we will be the exception
- We all use this excuse from time to time, but we're not fooling ourselves and we're certainly not fooling God
 - Our spirit knows better that the word of God can be trusted
 - The Lord is faithful to His word, so as we play with sin, our spirit knows we're playing a game of roulette
 - Sooner or later, if we persist in disobedience, our number comes up
 - But the Bible also warns of hardening of our heart
 - You could define a hardened heart as reaching the point where you believe believing your own lies
 - I think that's how to understand the exiles in Babylon
 - They were a rebellious house because they had come to believe their own lies about God
 - And so they repeated the proverb among themselves even though they had plenty of proof the Lord was faithful
- So how does the Lord answer this excuse? Very simply...he renders it void

Ezek. 12:23 “Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel.” But tell them, “The days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision.

Ezek. 12:24 “For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.

Ezek. 12:25 “For I the Lord will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it,” declares the Lord God.”

- The Lord asks Ezekiel to respond to their excuse by saying, therefore tell them I will make this proverb cease
 - The Lord will bring their proverb to an end by proving it wrong
 - He says the days are drawing near when everything He has foretold through Ezekiel and Jeremiah will come to pass
 - Every vision will happen, and it will happen soon
 - The Lord is going to call Israel’s bluff
 - Moreover, the Lord says there no longer will be false visions or flattering divination given within the house of Israel
 - Not only will the Lord prove the accuracy of His words, but He will frustrate the words of the false prophets in Israel
 - Notice the false prophets were this who gave flattering prophecies to the people, prophecies that the people liked to hear
 - This is hardly surprising, since false teachers and prophets have always sought the approval of men rather than God
 - In the New Testament Paul calls such false teaching “tickling ears”
 - Tickling ears produces a counterfeit joy that isn’t rooted in anything real so cannot last
 - These wolves in sheep’s clothing were sowing confusing among the people, encouraging skepticism of prophecy by their false words
 - Because of so many false prophets, the people of Israel assumed men like Isaiah and Jeremiah were just like the rest

- They lumped the whole group together – both true prophets and false – and then they chose to ignore them all
- But they neglected to notice that some guys, like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, got it right...every time
- So the Lord is going to get rid of the noise growing out His voice among the people by thwarting the words of the false prophets
 - Obviously, the predictions of false prophets have no power to come true in any case
 - But sometimes they get lucky or sometimes the outcome isn't clear one way or the other
 - But now God was preparing to actively oppose the predictions of false prophets
 - So when a false prophet flattered someone by promising God was going to bring a healing, God left their infirmity remain instead
 - When a false prophet promised a person riches, the Lord brought the person to ruin
 - Promises of safety would lead to disaster, promises of children would leave a mother barren, and so on
 - Soon the people would come to see the difference between the true prophets and the false prophets
 - In fact I imagine it didn't take long before the last thing the people wanted was to be the subject of a false prophet's visions
 - The Lord has more to say about false prophets in the next chapter
 - Meanwhile, everything Ezekiel said would happen would take place just as the Lord promised
 - Notice He says in your days, O rebellious house, these things will be carried out
 - The Lord is hastening these things in response to the people's stubborn doubts in His word
 - Those who had scoffed at Ezekiel were going live to see how wrong they were

- Once again this is how the Lord gains the attention of His people
- So Israel's first excuse survived in their culture because of two factors
 - The people of God had short memories of God's faithfulness and they gave their attention to false voices drowning out the truth
 - These same problems still exist among God's people today
 - So it makes sense we should still see this excuse in use today
 - And therefore the solution remains the same
 - We need to amplify the Lord's voice in our life, remembering His faithfulness, and we need to turn down the false voices everywhere
 - It's like two volume knobs on a radio
 - We need to turn up the truth and turn down the static
 - Because the more you remember the faithfulness of the Lord and the less you trust proven liars, the more reason you will have to act in obedience to the truth
 - As William Gurnall once said:

What more powerful consideration can be thought on to make us true to God, than the faithfulness and truth of God to us?

- As you pursue your study of God's word, allow time to reflect on the times God has been faithful to you
 - Those moments of grace when He stepping in to alter the course of your life or provide or comfort you
 - The ways He brought encouragement or strengthened you to face a trial
 - How He took a small step of faith and magnified it in amazing ways
- Those memories of yesterday become a testimony that encourages us to anticipate His faithfulness tomorrow
 - And as Gurnall said, nothing will give us cause to be true to God more than to remember His faithfulness to us

- The exiles forgot God's faithfulness to His word and it encouraged them to scoff at the prophets
- And secondly, we need to grow in our discernment for where we go for counsel and who we give our attention
 - Our world is filled with false prophets, but most of them don't wear sackcloth or say "Yea, verily..."
 - Instead, they host daytime talk shows or write bestselling books
 - They might be that well-meaning but ungodly neighbor or relative always ready to hand out advice
- When you rely on those false voices and in the end they prove themselves worthless, you may start to think like these exiles
 - You may assume every voice is false, every teacher is wrong
 - Your cynicism grows, and eventually you turn away from God's people and from God's word too
 - That's the place of a hard heart
- Remember the case of Zecharias, the father of John the Baptist?

[Luke 1:13](#) But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

[Luke 1:14](#) "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

[Luke 1:15](#) "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

[Luke 1:16](#) "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

[Luke 1:17](#) "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

[Luke 1:18](#) Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."

[Luke 1:19](#) The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

[Luke 1:20](#) "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

- The priest was standing next to an angel in the Holy Place of the temple

- He knows the messenger is someone special and he's afraid of what he sees
 - The angel responds with great news, that Zacharias will have a son
 - And that this son will be used mightily by the Lord
 - And how does the priest respond to this great revelation of God?
- He asks for proof...he's making the same excuse in a way
 - He's saying my wife has been barren for our whole marriage, so the days are long and nothing changes
 - And perhaps others have prayed over them or prophesied they would have children, but those things didn't come to pass
 - So now he doubts everyone, even an angel in the temple of God
 - And we see what God did to discipline this man
- If we persist in listening to the wrong voices, The Lord may act against us too, out of love to demonstrate the folly of trusting in the world
 - If you place your trust in wealth or status instead of in the word of God, then maybe He'll shake your financial world
 - Prefer the opinions of your godless friends or the talking heads on TV rather than of the voice of your pastor or elders?
 - Then maybe He'll frustrate your plans
 - Prefer the leading of your flesh over the leading of the Spirit? Maybe He'll bring your flesh to its end
 - All these things are possible, but the Lord doesn't want us to experience them
 - A God willing to place Himself on a Roman cross for the sake of sinful men and women is a God who has proven He has our best interests at heart
 - So when He directs us in His word, you can know He is telling the truth and it's for the best
 - He's not trying to steal away your fun or deny you what you need
 - He's telling you that He knows best what's good

- And while His grace knows no limits, His patience does have a limit
 - Using the excuse of “so far, so good” is like daring God to speed up His plan and to expose our misplaced trust
 - Don’t let yourself follow in the footsteps of these exiles, forgetting the faithfulness of God and dismissing His counsel
- We still have a few verses left in chapter 12, and these verses give us time to examine the second excuse Israel offered, which was closely connected to the first

Ezek. 12:27 “Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’

Ezek. 12:28 “Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed,”’” declares the Lord God.

- Once again the Lord comes to Ezekiel telling him what the people are saying about His prophecies
 - Some are saying the Ezekiel’s visions are true, but they will not come true for many years from now
 - This is a variant on the earlier excuse
 - In the first case, the people were saying nothing ever changes and prophets are always proven false
 - This excuse says the prophets do speak truthfully
 - But they speak about things so far away, we need not concern ourselves with what they say
 - I think of this excuse when I hear scientists telling us that in a few billion years from now, our sun will exhaust all its fuel and go supernova
 - The sun will violently explode
 - And the explosion will grow to consume every planet in the solar system
 - All life on earth will be extinguished, and even the planet itself will cease to exist
 - Why doesn’t that prediction worry people? It’s because of that little detail at the beginning...“in a few billion years from now”

- We hear that part of the prediction, and we say, “Oh that sounds terrible...what are we having for dinner?”
- It’s not a concern because we’ll never live to see it and we have more pressing concerns
- That same thinking is also reflected in that passage I quoted earlier from 2Peter...it won’t happen to us
- But the exiles weren’t listening to Ezekiel’s words very carefully, because he’s been predicting things that could be far away
 - For example, in his prophecy concerning the destruction of the city in chapter 11, Ezekiel predicted the death of two current leaders in the city of Jerusalem
 - So obviously if his predictions are true, then they have to come to pass during their lifetimes
 - It’s more of the same bad logic we’ve discussed already
 - These people are willfully blind
- If you’ve never used the first excuse, perhaps you’ve used the second, because they are two sides of the same coin
 - God’s word is true...but just not yet
 - The Lord says He’s coming back for His church, but I’m guessing it’s not happening today
 - The Lord says that I should be serving Him and should be growing in my spiritual maturity...but that can wait for tomorrow
 - If the first excuse could be labeled denial, then this one could be labeled delay
 - We don’t deny the truth of the word; we just tell us that it’s too far away to matter
 - Like a supernova, God’s word is interesting in theory, but it’s not very practical
 - I think this is one of the more common excuses you find in the church today for why people ignore and flat out disobey the word of God

- It's why you see so many pastors pandering to congregations with sermons advertised to be "relevant" or "practical"
- I think those are code words for "Bible-free" preaching
- Our church culture has been trained to acknowledge the Bible is true but to also assume it doesn't speak to our situation or needs
 - Part of the problem is there is a lot of bad Bible teaching going on
 - There are a lot of men in the pulpit who couldn't find their way out of a paper bag, much less divide rightly the word of God
 - And when our people sit under such nonsense week after week, it dulls their senses and distorts their view of what Bible teaching should be
- It's the same situation that caused the exiles to use the same excuse
 - They had false teachers everywhere, which cheapened their appreciation for God's word
 - In the end, many acknowledged the true of God's word, but none of it seemed meaningful or relevant
 - So they said it concerns distant things, therefore we can ignore it
- When I began to teach Ezekiel to our congregation, I heard from several pastors who said they would never consider teaching this book to their congregations
 - They said they didn't think their people would listen to it...the content was too far removed from their experience
 - At first, I gave some thought to those words and began to worry this wasn't the right book for me to teach either
 - And then I realized this was the very excuse that God condemns in His word... *ironically in this very book*
 - God gave us this book for a reason, and if we think it's too remote, it's only because we've forgotten the power of God's word
 - Some of the events of this book are distant...and some are right around the corner
 - Some of the situations in this book are unique to ancient Israel... but many are as relevant to us as our own diary

- You only have to look deeper into what God is saying to find what He has for you
- The solution to ending this excuse among God's people is the same as the earlier excuse
 - In v.28 the Lord simply declares that none of His words will be delayed any longer
 - He will speak to near term events and He will bring them to pass
 - And then the people will not be able to claim that His word isn't relevant
 - I believe we're living in days when the Lord is preparing to remove this excuse from the church as well
 - Prophecies are being fulfilled
 - And much more is going to happen soon
 - Now is not the time to doubt the word of the Lord or to think it's not happening soon
 - It's all true, and it's all relevant