

Ezekiel 12

- It's time to start the third division of prophecy in the book of Ezekiel
 - This third section runs from chapter 12-19
 - This section is really quite interesting because it's the first time we hear from the exiles themselves
 - They've been watching and listening to Ezekiel's prophecies for the past year or so, but they haven't believed him
 - So in these eight chapters they offer eight excuses for why Ezekiel's prophecies will not come to pass
 - And the Lord speaks through Ezekiel to refute all eight excuses in their hearing
 - In chapter 12, we find the first of their excuses, but it doesn't show up right away
 - In fact, we don't get to that excuse until next week
 - Because before we get to the excuse, the Lord has Ezekiel prepare another street performance to send a message

Ezek. 12:1 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 12:2 "Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 12:3 "Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself baggage for exile and go into exile by day in their sight; even go into exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand though they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 12:4 "Bring your baggage out by day in their sight, as baggage for exile. Then you will go out at evening in their sight, as those going into exile.

Ezek. 12:5 "Dig a hole through the wall in their sight and go out through it.

Ezek. 12:6 "Load the baggage on your shoulder in their sight and carry it out in the dark. You shall cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have set you as a sign to the house of Israel."

Ezek. 12:7 I did so, as I had been commanded. By day I brought out my baggage like the baggage of an exile. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands; I went out in the dark and carried the baggage on my shoulder in their sight.

- The Lord gives Ezekiel another message to act out before His people in exile

- Notice this message is not dated as were the past two prophecies
 - That tells us that this is a continuation of the moment from the earlier vision that started in chapter 8
 - Nevertheless, we count this as a separate section because the material differs dramatically from the previous section
 - So we must assume that Ezekiel has related what he saw in those visions
 - And the people have had a chance to respond
- And from what we learn in this chapter, they haven't responded well
 - In fact, they are denying Ezekiel's word
 - Their rebellion against the word of the Lord began while in Jerusalem
 - And it continues even now while they are in exile
- In v.2 the Lord tells Ezekiel that these people are a rebellious house
 - He says they have eyes to see and ears to hear but don't see or hear
 - The Lord is speaking in spiritual terms
 - Through their prophet, the people have been given "sight" of spiritual truth
 - And as Ezekiel has spoken spiritual truth to them, they have been given "ears" to hear the Lord
 - The Lord has shown Ezekiel what will happen to Israel so that the people might repent and respond in the right way
 - But instead they deny Ezekiel's prophecies, which means they aren't seeing and hearing as they should
 - I like this description of how men and women respond to the word of God
 - All believers have the been given spiritual truth in the word of God
 - And we all have the Spirit of God to teach us all things

- And sometimes we use these things to see and hear truth and respond to it
- And then there are other times we close our eyes and ears because we're rebellious
- Ignoring the word of God is like closing our eyes and ears to God
 - And grieving the Spirit is like ignoring the Lord
 - It never ceases to amaze me how many Christians treat study of God's word as an optional pursuit
 - And how many more will knowingly adopt views of life and ministry that are directly contradicted by scripture
- These are moments of rebellion
 - We all have these moments to deal with in our lives
 - It's never a good thing, but the real problem begins when we make this pattern our lifestyle
 - We determine to keep our eyes shut and ears closed because we prefer our rebellion
- When we do this, we'll feel the Spirit's conviction as He works to bring us back to the Lord in obedience
 - Sometimes we respond to that conviction in the right way, returning to the word, listening to the Spirit
 - But sometimes we make excuses for our rebellion and intentional blindness
 - And I bet many of those excuses for why we can't (or won't) do what the Lord wants sound like the excuses Israel offered Ezekiel
- The Lord knows the excuses are coming, so he give Ezekiel a message to send the people, and once again He asks Ezekiel to act out the message
 - This skit will reinforce the truth that they've already heard from Ezekiel
 - That the city of Jerusalem will be sacked, destroyed and the people sent into exile
 - The Jewish people will be removed from the land entirely
 - They will be scattered and the temple destroyed

- And they will not return for a long time
- That's the key issue that the exiles failed to grasp
 - While they understood that Judah was under judgment (because their own exile made that truth self-evident)
 - They didn't grasp the magnitude of that judgment
 - They assumed they were going to be held outside the land of Israel for a short time and soon they would return
 - And they assumed their brethren would remain in the city maintaining a Jewish presence in the land
 - And they assumed the glory of the Lord would remain living alongside the people as it had for the previous 340 years
- These wrong assumptions had given them false hope, and that false hope gave opportunity for their pride to stir up rebellion in their hearts
 - Misplaced confidence gave birth to hard hearts
 - And yet the Lord is still working to soften them
 - Notice in v.3 the Lord tells Ezekiel to perform these acts in the hope that perhaps Israel will get the message
- Ezekiel is told to pack baggage for exile and leave his home
 - The baggage for an exile would be very little of course
 - Someone going into exile is in a rush and under threat, so they gather only a few essentials
 - Therefore, Ezekiel would have taken only the bare necessities from his home
 - The Lord tells him to take it out by daylight
 - This probably means Ezekiel brought out his belongings into the court that typically surrounded homes in that day
 - This would have turned to a spectacle, with clothes, some food or other items thrown out the door
 - His neighbors would be asking what Ezekiel was doing or where he was planning to go?

- Then later in the day, as evening approached, Ezekiel was to move out of his home
 - But he isn't to leave through the door or gate
 - He must dig a hole in the wall, probably a hole in his courtyard wall
- And then he will crawl through the hole with his baggage at nightfall
 - Leaving at nightfall pictures the calamity that will fall upon the people as they walk in darkness
 - And crawling through a wall reminds the people of the circumstances in which the exiles leave
 - They aren't leaving through the gate as in times a peace
 - They will be taken out of a city that has fallen to a siege campaign and has seen its walls breached
- Finally, as he crawls through the hole, Ezekiel is told to cover his face so he can't see the land
 - The general point is that the exiles won't see their land after they leave it behind
 - This isn't a temporary affliction nor will Israel escape their enemies or find refuge elsewhere in Israel
 - But this detail has an even darker meaning that the Lord will reveal shortly
- In v.7 Ezekiel reports that he did exactly as the Lord intended
 - And of course, his antics would have been the talk of the town
 - He's already gained a reputation as a man who sees visions and does crazy things
 - So as soon as he starts throwing clothes outside his house, he probably attracted a crowd
 - And then when he began digging in his courtyard wall, you know the people started laughing and mocking him
 - And that's the reason the Lord gave Ezekiel this task

- This people have been given this same prophecy before, and yet they continue to ignore it
- So the Lord is amplifying the message through this spectacle
- The people certainly can't ignore what they see Ezekiel doing
- The question is will they come to understand that Ezekiel is communicating the words of God?
- It's natural to feel some pity for Ezekiel at this point
 - He's being asked to sacrifice his pride and honor to reach a people who have repeatedly rejected the word of the Lord
 - It's tempting to think they had their chance...they made their bed, let them lie in it
 - Why should a man of obedience and upright character like Ezekiel sacrifice his dignity to serve a people who couldn't care less about pleasing God?
- Because it's called ministry for a reason...it's what the Lord asks from all of us though in different ways
 - The word minister means to serve, and service isn't easy and it won't be possible without a personal cost
 - We're all called to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the lost s
 - And our personal sacrifice is a primary means for us to glorify the Lord
 - Serving God isn't all doom and gloom, of course
 - Sometimes, the Lord allows us to stand in the spotlight, to receive the thanks and accolades of those we serve
 - To experience triumphs and to see miraculous fruit
 - Moments like Peter experienced at Pentecost or Paul and Barnabas experienced in Antioch
 - These are the moments we all yearn for, and the Lord will grant them from time to time to encourage us and to glorify Himself
 - But other times – perhaps most of the time – serving the Lord demands great personal sacrifice

- There are no spotlights, no cheering crowds, no fame or fortune
 - The Lord assigns us a task that *requires* we set aside personal interests like wealth, comfort, safety, popularity, & dignity
 - At the very least, you sacrifice your time when you serve the Lord
 - Even worse, we may lose our career, friends, family, or freedom
 - He calls us to take up a cross of shame for the Lord, just as our Lord did for us
- No one is exempt from this pattern, for even the apostles knew this call, as Paul reminds us

1Cor. 4:9 For, I think, God has **exhibited** us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

- Paul says the Lord exhibited the apostles as a spectacle, meaning He put them on public display just as He did Ezekiel
- What spectacle did God call Paul to perform? I'll let Paul tell you in his own words

2Cor. 6:1 And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain –

2Cor. 6:2 for He says,

“At the acceptable time I listened to you,
And on the day of salvation I helped you.”

Behold, now is “The acceptable time,” behold, now is “The day of salvation” –

2Cor. 6:3 giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited,

2Cor. 6:4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

2Cor. 6:5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,

2Cor. 6:6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,

2Cor. 6:7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,

2Cor. 6:8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true;

2Cor. 6:9 as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,

2Cor. 6:10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

- Paul's suffering for the gospel matter little to him, because he knew had everything he needed waiting for him in the eternal realm
 - And he had more of it because of his willingness to serve God in sacrificial ways
 - Simply put, Paul lived with eyes for eternity
- Likewise, Ezekiel was called to be a servant to the people of Israel: a disobedient, stiff-necked people
 - Serving God under those circumstances required great personal sacrifice
 - But his obedience in this difficult assignment and his service to a disobedient, unappreciative audience made for an even more powerful testimony
 - And we presume an even more glorious reward
- After Ezekiel completed his task, the Lord gives Ezekiel a full interpretation of his skit

Ezek. 12:8 In the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 12:9 “Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’

Ezek. 12:10 “Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem as well as all the house of Israel who are in it.”’

Ezek. 12:11 “Say, ‘I am a sign to you. As I have done, so it will be done to them; they will go into exile, into captivity.’

Ezek. 12:12 “The prince who is among them will load his baggage on his shoulder in the dark and go out. They will dig a hole through the wall to bring it out. He will cover his face so that he can not see the land with his eyes.

Ezek. 12:13 “I will also spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. And I will bring him to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans; yet he will not see it, though he will die there.

Ezek. 12:14 “I will scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I will draw out a sword after them.

Ezek. 12:15 “So they will know that I am the Lord when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries.

Ezek. 12:16 “But I will spare a few of them from the sword, the famine and the pestilence that they may tell all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.”

- The Lord explains the meaning of all the symbols in his drama, presumably so the prophet could communicate it to the people in case they missed the point
 - Notice the Lord says in v.9 that the people have been asking Ezekiel “what are you doing?”
 - Obviously, the skit got their attention as was attended
 - They have watched it intently and now they want to know what it all means
 - So the Lord explains to Ezekiel what it all means
 - First, in v.10 the Lord says this burden that Ezekiel bore concerned the prince in Jerusalem
 - The term prince here refers to the ruling king of Judah, King Zedekiah
 - Zedekiah was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar following the second siege of the city
 - The previous king, Jehoiachin, had rebelled against Babylonian rule, and was taken into exile with the second wave of refugees
 - Ezekiel and the rest of the exiles still saw Jehoiachin as the legitimate king, so the prophet calls Zedekiah merely the “prince”
 - But Zedekiah was ruling over those left behind in Jerusalem, and this prophecy describes what was coming for him and the rest of the people
 - Just as was done to the earlier exiles so it will be for those still in the city
 - Even King Zedekiah will find himself trying to escape the city under cover of darkness with a few possessions on his back
 - He will dig a hole through the rubble of the wall and he will cover his face to conceal his identity
- Then, the Lord says in v.13 that He would set a net and snare for this king
 - The Lord promises Zedekiah would be captured by the Babylonians and brought back to Babylon as an exile
 - Eventually, the king would die as an exile in the land of Babylon, never having returned to Israel

- Nevertheless, the Lord says, the king would never see the land he will occupy
- According to Josephus, the king received word of this prophecy somehow, perhaps by a Jew slave traveling with a Babylonian official
 - But unsurprisingly, Josephus says the king didn't believe it
 - Ironically, Josephus says Zedekiah rejected the prophecy because he thought it disagreed with the words of the Jerusalem prophet, Jeremiah
- Here's what Josephus wrote

Ezekiel also foretold in Babylon what calamities were coming upon the people, which when he heard, he sent accounts of them unto Jerusalem; but Zedekiah did not believe their prophecies, for the reason following:—It happened that the two prophets agreed with one another in what they said as in all other things, that the city should be taken, and Zedekiah himself should be taken captive; but Ezekiel disagreed with Jeremiah, and said, that Zedekiah should not see Babylon; while Jeremiah said to him, that the king of Babylon should carry him away to there in bonds; and because they did not both say the same thing as to this circumstance, Zedekiah disbelieved what they both appeared to agree in, and condemned them as not speaking truth to him, although all the things foretold him did come to pass according to their prophecies...

- The king thought the two prophets were in disagreement, but in fact they were in perfect agreement
- Both said the king would end up in Babylon, and so he did
- But Ezekiel adds that Zedekiah wouldn't see the land, and that turned out to be true also
- When Nebuchadnezzar met the exiles in Riblah, he had all the leaders of the city killed
 - He also killed Zedekiah's sons in front of the king, so that he was forced to witness the death of his children
 - And then Nebuchadnezzar had both of Zedekiah's eye's gouged out so that he was made blind
 - And thus the king never saw the land of Babylon
- Finally, the prophecy explains in v.15 that the people of the city would be scattered among the other nations and spread into other countries

- Many would die in the siege and others would die in captivity by disease and famine
 - But to fulfill the Lord's purposes, He says He will spare a few of Israel so they may be His witnesses
 - They will testify to these events so they may become cause for future generations of Israel to remain true to the covenant
 - So that is the full meaning of the prophecy Ezekiel acted out
- It's interesting that as the people were asking Ezekiel what his strange routine meant, he didn't have answers for them
 - We can safely assume Ezekiel understood the broad storyline about the coming exile
 - After all, the Lord has already told that story a couple of times already
 - And so most people probably gathered this was another message of judgment
 - But the exact meaning of each little detail wasn't available to Ezekiel or to the people until after he had completed the task
 - Only then the Lord revealed the full meaning to them
 - And as you can see, these details could never have been understood until the Lord put the pieces together
 - Can you identify with Ezekiel's situation? I know I can
 - God asks you to serve Him in some way, but His call doesn't make sense to you
 - It lacks details, it doesn't answer your questions or doubts
 - And others may even ask you why you are doing what you're doing, but all you can say is the Lord told you to do it
 - They wonder if you've got a screw loose and you're beginning to question yourself too
 - It's a test of faith
- Years ago my wife and I were attending a church where we were active in teaching the Bible and we liked the pastor and had good friends

- After attending there several years, there came a point when we felt the Lord was calling us to leave the church
 - He didn't give us a specific reason though we searched to explain it to ourselves
 - We didn't have a new church waiting for us and even if we found one, we knew we wouldn't be able to teach or serve right away
 - All we knew was it was time to leave
- Leaving a church is tough enough even when you have good reasons
 - Leaving a church means leaving friends, leaving service opportunities, kids leaving their friends too
 - You don't want to hurt feelings and you don't look forward to the grueling process of finding the next church home
- But when you don't have a specific reason for why you're leaving, everything gets even harder
 - When the pastor or our friends asked us why were leaving, we didn't have an acceptable answer
 - I remember telling him I felt the Lord was telling us to be "available"
 - That answer confused them, and I assume he thought we weren't telling him the whole story
 - And our kids were *not* happy
- The truth was even we didn't like that answer and we weren't sure we were moving in the right direction, because we didn't know what the Lord was doing
 - And not knowing turned out to be an even bigger test of our faith than if the Lord had told us everything up front
 - That test of faith was whether we were willing to step out in obedience without having all the answers
 - And whether we were willing to wait on Him to direct us when we had no place to go
 - A couple of months went by...we had largely stopped attending church

- And then a couple of families approached us asking us to start a church with them, and my career as a pastor was launched
- And suddenly we had our answer for why we needed to leave, why we needed to be available
- Ezekiel was probably getting used to getting strange assignments that came with more questions than answers
 - But still, he had to step out even before he know what the Lord was doing
 - And He had to endure the questions from the crowd, from neighbors and perhaps even his friends
 - And he didn't have answers other than "Thus saith the Lord"
- Each of these moments built up the prophet's faith, giving him greater reason to obey the next time God asked something difficult and didn't explain why
 - Later in this book, the Lord is going to ask even greater sacrifice of Ezekiel
 - These earlier moments teach Ezekiel to serve God even when he didn't understand
- Look for that same pattern in your walk with Christ
 - Expect Him to call you to small tasks first and greater tasks later
 - Watch Him call you without explanation and then provide the answer after you've obeyed
 - And when you've gained some practice in following, trusting that answers come in time, you're find the burden growing lighter
 - You'll begin to understand Jesus words when My yoke is easy and My burden is light
- When you learn to follow the Lord sacrificially and without requiring all the answers first, He'll do great things through you