

God's Prophecies Will Be Fulfilled Despite Unbelief

We are starting a new section in the book of Ezekiel. It is the third cycle of prophecies, and it begins with Ezekiel 12 and ends with chapter 19. In this section we will read about two signs, and a series of proverbs and parables. This cycle of prophecies will give us different explanations and details about Yahweh's judgment upon those living in Jerusalem and Judah. As a result, we will gain some great insights about our God and the behavior of men.

Our study is from Ezekiel 12. Verses 1 and 2 describe a serious problem with the people. Verses 3-16 give us Yahweh's first sign to these people. Verses 17-20 reveal Yahweh's second sign. Verses 21-25 are about a proverb, and the remaining verses of the chapter are about a second proverb. So, we will learn about two signs and two proverbs that are related to an amazing prophecy.

THE ISSUE.
Verses 1-2 say,

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 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. Ezekiel 12:1-2 (NASB)

Ezekiel states "The word of Yahweh came to me." This phrase occurs thirteen times in this section and four times in this chapter. That is, the message the prophet spoke was from Yahweh and not from Ezekiel.

In verse 2 Yahweh calls Ezekiel "son of man." We learned earlier in chapter 2 that when Yahweh called Ezekiel "son of man," He was simply calling him "human." It is a reminder of our inferior and humble position before our God. We can learn several things from this statement. First, Yahweh sovereignly decided to use Ezekiel. He was Yahweh's choice. Yahweh did not post an advertisement for the job on the Jerusalem website. Ezekiel did not apply for this job. Yahweh called him to be His prophet and He expected him to submit in humble service. Just read the opening verses of chapter 2. When God called him, He commanded Ezekiel to do just that. Service for God is not a choice, but it is a privilege.



Second, it is a reminder that God often uses inferior people to serve Him. Moses thought he was not an eloquent speaker. Elijah was afraid that he was the only follower of God who was left. Ezekiel was told that no one would listen to him. That could

make someone feel like a failure. The apostles were not political leaders of their times, and they had serious pride issues. Yahweh often chooses to use seemingly inferior people.

Third, the expression "son of man" is also a reminder that any opportunity to serve the Lord is a gift and not something that we deserve. Our response should be an eagerness to serve Him. Fourth, those who serve God are given special insights into our God as we will see in verse 2.

Then in verse 2, Yahweh shared His own view of the people in the city of Jerusalem with Ezekiel. Yahweh called them “the rebellious.” Now we must remember that Ezekiel is living with the exiles in Babylon. The exiles included the righteous remnant whom Yahweh had saved in the first and second deportation, and also some unbelieving Jews. The third deportation is what the book of Ezekiel is about. So, “the rebellious” were the unbelieving exiles.

The expression “the rebellious” is like a pair of bookends. It occurs two times in this verse. In between the bookends Yahweh says they, “Have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear.” The expression does not mean they could not see with their eyes or hear with their ears. It means they could not understand biblical truth because of their unrepentant sin and the sin of unbelief. 1 Corinthians 2:14 teaches us that the unbeliever is not able to understand spiritual truth. This occurs because he does not believe in God. He does not have the spiritual wisdom to understand the signs of the times or the message of Scripture. So, this helps us understand Yahweh’s definition of “the rebellious.”

Notice that Yahweh blames them for being spiritually blind and deaf. Because of their stubborn, unrepentant, and unbelieving hearts Yahweh had sealed their judgment. In Ezekiel 7:9-10 Yahweh declared,

‘My eye will show no pity nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting. Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed. Ezekiel 7:9-10 (NASB)

And we read in Ezekiel 11:19 that Yahweh said they had hearts of stone. So due to their rebellious hearts, they could not understand spiritual truth, and Yahweh sealed their fate with certain judgment.

This is a warning to every stubborn, unrepentant, and unbelieving person. It is also a warning to believers. Believers must remember that God judges unrepentant believers too! 1 John 5:16-17 tells us that there is a sin leading to death. That is, God will not allow an unrepentant believer to sin endlessly.

FIRST SIGN—ACT LIKE AN EXILE. Then Yahweh told

Ezekiel to give them the first of two signs. The first sign is given in verses 3-6. It is actually an illustration of a person going into exile. Here are verses 3-6.

“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. 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. Dig a hole through the wall in their sight and go out through it. 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.” Ezekiel 12:3-6 (NASB)

In verse 3, Ezekiel was told to prepare for travel—to pack his bags. He was to pretend that he was leaving Jerusalem and going into exile. He was to do this during the day so the exiles could watch him. Apparently, he was to repeatedly do this. The goal was that the people would see him. Yahweh said, “Perhaps they will understand though they are a rebellious house.” That is, maybe the people would understand that the sign referred to the Babylonian army invading and defeating them.

Verse 4 repeats most of verse 3 but adds that in the evening his actions would illustrate going into exile. Verse 5 adds that he was to dig a hole in some wall where they could watch him. Verse 6 adds that he was to take his baggage with him through the hole when the sky was dark, and with his eyes covered. That seems to be a really stupid part of the sign, but it was not. Then Yahweh stated that when Ezekiel performed this skit, it would be a sign for the house of Israel.

In verse 7, Ezekiel said that he obeyed Yahweh’s command.

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. Ezekiel 12:7 (NASB)

The Hebrew tense of “I did” implies that he was continuously repeating the act of bringing out his baggage in the morning,

digging a hole in the wall with his hands, and carrying his baggage out while blindfolded. This sign reveals Yahweh's loving heart for them. Even though judgment is certain, Yahweh keeps urging these unbelievers to repent.

In verse 8, Yahweh begins to speak again.

In the morning the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' 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." 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.'" Ezekiel 12:8-11 (NASB)

In the morning Yahweh asked Ezekiel, "Has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'" The implied answer is, "Yes, they did." Then Yahweh told Ezekiel to say that the sign was about the prince of Jerusalem and all of the house of Israel. Ezekiel was to tell the exiles that he was a sign to them. The prince and his people will "go into exile, into captivity." That was the meaning of Ezekiel's sign or illustration.

Now who is the "prince"? The answer is King Zedekiah in Jerusalem. We need to start with 2 Kings 24:8 in order to understand what "prince" means. 2 Kings 24:8 tells us that Jehoiachin became king when he was eighteen years of age. Verse 9 says he was an evil king. Then 2 Kings 24:10-16 says that King Jehoiachin surrendered to the Babylonian army when the army arrived at Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar then took captives to Babylon.

Then 2 Kings 24:17 says that King Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah the king. But he was not of royal descent. So, Jeremiah 37:1 says that Zedekiah reigned in place of King Jehoiachin. That helps us understand that Zedekiah is the prince, but he did not belong on the throne in Jerusalem.

The next verses in Ezekiel 12 help us further understand that the prince is Zedekiah. They also reveal that Ezekiel's sign matched what happened when the Babylonian army invaded Jerusalem. Verses 12-16 add,

The prince who is among them will load his baggage on his shoul-

der 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 cannot see the land with his eyes. 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. 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. So they will know that I am the LORD when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries. 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." Ezekiel 12:12-16 (NASB)

Yahweh said that Zedekiah would prepare his baggage and leave the city of Jerusalem at night through an opening in the wall. In verse 13, He said Zedekiah would be captured like an animal by a net and be brought to Babylon. But he would not see Babylon though he would die there. Verse 14 states that almost everyone around him would die. We should take special notice that Yahweh said He would spare a few from sword, famine, and pestilence. We have seen that statement earlier in Ezekiel 6:11. If we combine both passages, we discover that Yahweh uses "sword, the famine and the pestilence" to punish nations. Romans 1:24, 26, and 28 also adds that God no longer suppresses evil as judgment on a nation. Why did God do that? He gives us the answer in verse 15. "So they will know that I am the LORD when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries." He revealed they had a problem of unbelief.

We have just read the prophecy. So, let's read the fulfillment in 2 Kings 25:1-7. It occurred in 586 B.C.

Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city.

And they went by way of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon. 2 Kings 25:1-7 (NASB)

Verse 1 says that King Nebuchadnezzar and all his army came against Jerusalem. Verse 2 says the siege continued until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. That would be the year 586 B.C. Verse 3 says the famine was severe. That agrees with the passage we just read in Ezekiel 12:16. Yahweh allowed famine. Verse 4 says that when the army broke into Jerusalem, Zedekiah and all the men fled through the gate between the walls beside the king's garden. That agrees with Ezekiel 12:12.

Verses 5-6 say Zedekiah and those with him managed to escape as far as Jericho. Jericho was only fifteen miles from Jerusalem. So, they did not get very far. Then Zedekiah was taken to Riblah. Archaeologists have found the ancient ruins of Riblah. It is about 310 miles north of Jerusalem. The city was located in the southern part of Syria. Riblah was the location of King Nebuchadnezzar's military headquarters. Verse 7 says Zedekiah saw his sons killed at Riblah, and his eyes were cut out before he was taken to Babylon bound with bronze fetters.

2 Chronicles 36:11-14 also reveals this happened to

Zedekiah because he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar and did evil, as well as his officials. Verses 17-21 says therefore Yahweh brought King Nebuchadnezzar against the city. He gave the people over to the Babylonian army. In our study of Ezekiel 10, the man in linen, an angel, was told to take coals of fire and scatter them over the city. That symbolized the burning of the city. Verse 19 says the army burned the city and temple. This is a climax in the prophecy of Ezekiel. Flavius Josephus verifies the details of this prophecy in his book the Antiquities of the Jews, Book X, chapters 7-9. This is truly an amazing prophecy.

Ezekiel 12:16 says the purpose of this first sign was that

they, "May know that I am the LORD." But, they did not believe Ezekiel. Imagine preaching for God and being rejected! That was Ezekiel's ministry.

**S E C O N D
S I G N—T R E M B L I N G
A N D
Q U I V E R I N G
W H I L E
E A T I N G.** Then Yahweh gave Zedekiah a

second sign to perform in verses 17-20.

Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, eat your bread with trembling and drink your water with quivering and anxiety. Then say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel, "They will eat their bread with anxiety and drink their water with horror, because their land will be stripped of its fullness on account of the violence of all who live in it. The inhabited cities will be laid waste and the land will be a desolation. So you will know that I am the LORD.'"" Ezekiel 12:17-20



(NASB)

The second sign that Ezekiel was to perform was to tremble while he ate some bread and quiver, as if anxious, while drinking water. He was to tell the people that this symbolized the future judgment for the people of Jerusalem would be in fear when the Babylonian army invaded. The Babylonian army would utterly destroy Jerusalem and all of Judah. Once again the purpose for this was that they, “May know that I am the LORD.”

FIRST PROVERB — EVERY VISION FAILS. We have just read some very significant prophecies in the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel. We have been waiting for the prophecy in this chapter to help connect the dots. Also, it was wonderful to see the historical fulfillment of it. Now Yahweh deals with some lies and distortions that existed among the people. He does this in a series of proverbs and parables. This chapter ends with the first of two proverbs in verses 21-25.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days are long and every vision fails’? 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. For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 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.’” Ezekiel 12:21-25 (NASB)

The proverb is “The days are long and every vision fails.” That is, some people did not believe Ezekiel’s prophecies. They were saying we have been waiting for so long. It has not happened yet. So, Yahweh commanded Ezekiel to tell the people that the days are coming when every prophecy will be fulfilled. All of the false prophecies will cease. “For I the LORD will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed.” Every prophecy will be fulfilled.

When Yahweh said, “any false vision or flattering divina-

tion,” he was referring to the false prophets who were telling the people that they would never be defeated by the Babylonian army again. They would be victorious. That was the same message of the leaders in Jerusalem in Ezekiel 11:1-2. Jeremiah 28 tells us that a false prophet named Hananiah gave a flattering divination. He claimed that King Nebuchadnezzar would be defeated, the exiles would return to Jerusalem and Judah, and all of the vessels of the temple would be returned. That was a flattering divination. It was a lie, but it pleased the people. Therefore, Jeremiah rebuked Hananiah and he died. There were other prophets who prophesied falsely too! So, Yahweh told Ezekiel to tell the people they were false prophets. “I will speak the word and perform it,”

2 Peter 3:3-4 contains a description that is very similar to this one in Ezekiel. It tells us that in the last days people will doubt the second coming of Christ. They will say, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Because the second coming of Christ has not occurred, they do not believe God. Also today, we have people creating false prophecies because they think they are a prophet or a prophetess. They should stop playing prophet because all prophecy of the future ended with the last apostle—the apostle John.

SECOND PROVERB — VISION IS MANY YEARS FROM NOW. The second proverb is in verses 26-28.

Furthermore, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “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.’ 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. Ezekiel 12:26-28 (NASB)

What is the proverb? The proverb said Ezekiel was seeing events in the distant future. The first proverb revealed some people did not believe Ezekiel’s prophecies. But this proverb reveals that other people did believe it might occur, If it did, it would not be in their lifetime. They were the “possibility thinkers!”

So, the Lord GOD said, “None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed.” It is amazing that the prophecy in Ezekiel 12 occurred in the year

592 B.C. But the invasion occurred four years later in 588 B.C. and the fulfillment happened in 586 B.C. When Yahweh said, "None of My words will be delayed any longer," we learn that His concept of "soon" is different than our concept of "soon."

CONCLUSION. We have been reminded that our God is sovereign. No person can frustrate His will (Isaiah 14:27). But there are several other points we must not miss. First, when God makes a promise about the future, He faithfully fulfills it. It may take a long time before it is fulfilled, but it will be fulfilled. God has made it clear that the return of Christ, or His second coming, will be fulfilled in the distant future. In Luke 17:22-23, Jesus told the disciples His second coming would not happen in their lifetime. Then in Luke 17:26-30, He taught us that His second coming would only come when evil had been so great that it was like the evil in the days of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah. He did not give us dates for this fulfillment. However, He did say in Revelation 3:11 that He was coming quickly. So, we should not be like the people in Ezekiel's proverbs. We should trust Him because the Lord God has said, "Whatever word I speak will be performed."

Second, we should remember that Yahweh urges us to believe in Him for our own sake. That is why He keeps saying, "I will speak the word and perform it." He called the Israelites rebellious because of their sin and unbelief. This is an important lesson for believers. We please God when we believe in Him. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith we cannot please Him. Let us now glorify Him and believe Him!