

# Ezekiel

## Week 14

### *The Siege of Jerusalem*

#### *Chapters 23-24*

#### **Chronic Nymphomania (23)**

This is the title given to chapter 23 in a well-respected, academic commentary on Ezekiel.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 23 allegorically reviews Israel's unfaithfulness toward God as demonstrated in trusting in foreign powers and their gods. The two sisters represent the capitals of the northern and the southern kingdom, respectively. And, if anything, this portrayal is even more graphic than the one in chapter 16. While we do not talk this way in polite company, God uses such explicit and graphic imagery to describe his people and their actions in the most deplorable way imaginable.<sup>2</sup> Understanding this helps us understand the drastic actions taken against Jerusalem in chapter 24.

#### **The Siege of Jerusalem (24:1-14)**

According to Parker and Dubberstein (*Babylonian Chronology* 28) this date represents January 15, 588 b.c. by our reckoning (see 20:1 Comment). This precision bears witness to the interacting of divine revelation and human history, so that neither can be understood apart from the other. On the human plane what happened on this day was a momentous event, like the arrival of the Russians at Berlin in World War II: it spelled the beginning of the end. On the theological plane it meant vindication for Ezekiel and for his insistence that the first fall of Jerusalem in 597 b.c. would not be reversed but worse was yet to come.<sup>3</sup> See 2 Kings 25.

Following the Hebrew more literally, this is the day when Nebuchadnezzar “leaned on” (*sāmak*) Jerusalem, a word with overtones of the sacrificial system. A worshiper approaching the sanctuary designated the animal to be sacrificed as his through a ritual “leaning on of hands” (Lev. 1:4; 3:2). By Ezekiel's use of this terminology, Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as designating Jerusalem as the sacrificial lamb—though hardly one without spot or blemish, as the law required—ready to be dismembered for the glory of God.

This sacrificial language leads into a parable to be delivered to the “rebellious house” (*bêt hammerî*, 24:3). This is a favorite expression for Judah in Ezekiel, one that indicates that their rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar is not a glorious (if doomed) fight for freedom and self-determination but rather an expression of their basic rebellious nature—a rebellion fundamentally directed against God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, L.C. *Word Biblical Commentary*

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, M. (2018). [Ezekiel, A 12-Week Study](#). (D. C. Ortlund, Ed.) (p. 41). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, L. C. (1998). [Ezekiel 20–48](#) (Vol. 29, p. 59). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

<sup>4</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (pp. 313–314). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

The pieces of meat represent the people of Jerusalem (see note, 11:3). The upper stratum of the citizenry will share the same fate as the rank and file. In order to make sure that the bones too are thoroughly boiled, they are to be placed under the meat and the water is to be brought to a high boiling point<sup>5</sup>

The “choice pieces” and “the best of these bones” from the “pick of the flock” (24:4–5) turn out to be nothing but defiled filth (*ḥel’ātâ*, 24:6). This filth that is inside her will not “come out” (*yāšā*; 24:6; niv, “go away”), a phrase that has a double meaning. In terms of the imagery of the pot, the filth that will not come out reflects the frustration of a burned-on mess that cannot be removed. On the level of the metaphorical meaning, “come out” is precisely what Jerusalem’s inhabitants hope to do at the end of the siege.<sup>6</sup>

Because blood was the essence of life, it was not to be consumed by the Israelites. See comments on Deuteronomy 12:16 and Leviticus 17:11, 12. Here, however, the issue is not the consumption of blood, but the exposure of blood. When the blood of an animal was shed and poured out, it was to be covered with earth (Lev 17:13). Exposed blood would “cry out” for vengeance (Gen 37:26).<sup>7</sup>

The blood Jerusalem has shed in her midst is left uncovered, poured out on a bare rock rather than on the ground (24:7). Blood left exposed would provoke the wrath of God, so their action was nothing less than a deliberate act of sacrilege. Like the blood of Abel, the blood of the innocent victims of the bloody city cries out for justice, and in consequence Jerusalem’s blood will also be poured out uncovered (Ezek. 24:8).<sup>8</sup>

*wearied herself*. Also translated “she has wearied Me.” The thought is that God’s previous chastisements were wasted efforts because they failed to produce repentance and so cleanse the city of her filthy lewdness (v 13).<sup>9</sup>

### **The Death of Ezekiel’s Wife (24:15-27)**

The second half of the chapter shows that the oracle of painful destruction is not delivered from the safety of an armchair in distant Babylon. The sword that is going to strike Jerusalem first strikes the prophet himself in the most painful and personal of his prophetic sign-acts. His own wife, the delight of his eyes, is suddenly taken from him (24:16). This is no random turn of fate, but a sudden stroke directly from God. Yet Ezekiel is not permitted to mourn publicly in the traditional ways, by lamentation and tears, disheveled clothing, and special food (24:17). All he can do is “groan quietly,” that is, mourn in privacy and isolation without the usual rites invoking social solidarity and sympathy.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 1348). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>6</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 314). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>7</sup> Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament](#) (electronic ed., Eze 24:7). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>8</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 314). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>9</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 1349). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>10</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 315). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

*Sigh.* According to prevailing funeral customs, the mourner was expected to (1) engage women to lament aloud (Mk 5:38); (2) take off the turban and go barefoot (2Sm 15:30; Is 20:2); (3) pull down a head-covering over his face to his lips (Mi 3:7); and (4) eat “the bread of men,” prepared by relatives and friends (Jer 16:7; Hos 9:4).<sup>11</sup>

This strange behavior is to be a sign to the people of the significance of what is to come (24:24). The temple in Jerusalem was their pride and joy; it had become as precious to the Jerusalemites as the closest of relations (24:21). This building, the delight of their eyes, will be desecrated by God. It will be destroyed along with the sons and daughters whom the exiles had left behind. Yet the people will not weep or wail or mourn publicly for the temple (24:22).<sup>12</sup>

But in the deepest depths of the gloom comes hope of a turning point in Judah’s fortunes. On the very day when the blow falls on Ezekiel’s compatriots, when the news of the fall of Jerusalem is confirmed by a fugitive, Ezekiel’s lips will be opened and he will be dumb no more (24:27). This dumbness was imposed on him at the outset of his ministry (see 3:26). He was thereby unable to intercede for the people, indeed, unable to speak anything at all except words of judgment. But a time is coming when his dumbness will be removed. With the destruction of Jerusalem, his words of judgment for the city will come to an end; their time will be complete.<sup>13</sup>

Ezekiel must hold in his sorrow over the death of his wife as a sign to the exiles that they have no right to mourn over the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. False tears offend God. He calls for true sorrow and contrition as genuine results of repentance. Our sins profaned His most glorious temple—the body and life of His Son. Yet the Father quietly gave Him over to death so that we might have life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 1349). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>12</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 315). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>13</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (pp. 315–316). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>14</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 1350). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.