

Ezekiel 24 (NIV)

24:1 In the ninth year, in the tenth month on the tenth day, the word of the LORD came to me:

24:2 "Son of man, record this date, this very date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.

Chapter 24 is the last oracle to the nation until Jerusalem is destroyed. It comes to Ezekiel two years and five months after his previous dated message in 20:1 (Alexander, 859).

Typically, Ezekiel dated his oracles from the time he and king Jehoiachin were exiled. That is, he dated them from the time of Jehoiachin's removal from the throne and deportation to Babylon in 597 BC. Thus, for example, Ezekiel 1:2 is dated as "the fifth day of the month of the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile," or July, 593 BC.

However, in 24:1 the date is linked to 2 Kings 25:1 suggesting that it is following the official Jewish reckoning that placed the starting date of the king's reign when he entered his first full year in office (Block, vol. 1, 733; vol. 2, 254). Thus, Ezekiel's dating system and the official system were a year off. (Ezekiel has the starting point of Jehoiachin's reign in 597 BC, while the official date would be 596 BC, or one year later).

The reason for Ezekiel switching his dating system here is because in verse 2 God specifically tells him to write down the name of the day, presumably reflecting the official system of dating, not Ezekiel's idiosyncratic method. Thus, Babylon began its siege of Jerusalem on January 5, 587 BC (Block, 773), a siege that would last 18 months. "By attaching date notices to his oracles he was marking and filing the evidence, moving prophecy in the direction of archival speech" (Block, 773). This is of particular importance when trying to establish the time frame in Ezekiel 33:21 when word of the fall of Jerusalem reaches the exiles (see Block, 772).

The date was a momentous one for this was the very day that Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. This is a turning point in the book, for up until this time Ezekiel had been warning of this event. It is also the turning point in Israel's history as it marks the end of an era. In later years this day would be remembered annually by the nation as a memorial day that would be accompanied with fasting (Zech. 8:19).

24:3 Tell this rebellious house a parable and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "'Put on the cooking pot; put it on and pour water into it.

24:4 Put into it the pieces of meat, all the choice pieces-- the leg and the shoulder. Fill it with the best of these bones;

24:5 take the pick of the flock. Pile wood beneath it for the bones; bring it to a boil and cook the bones in it.

What is left of the nation is likened to choice pieces of meat. In 11:3 the same figure was used by the people themselves. They thought they were the best pieces of the nation and presumed that however bad things got outside the walls of the city ("the pot"), they were safe like the meat inside. Ezekiel uses their own imagery to describe the judgment that has started as he writes.

Verses 6-12 interpret the imagery in verses 3-5:

24:6 "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "Woe to the city of bloodshed, to the pot now encrusted, whose deposit will not go away! Empty it piece by piece without casting lots for them.

24:7 "For the blood she shed is in her midst: She poured it on the bare rock; she did not pour it on the ground, where the dust would cover it.

24:8 To stir up wrath and take revenge I put her blood on the bare rock, so that it would not be covered.

As the following translations demonstrate, the expression "to the pot now encrusted" in verse 6 isn't as clear in Hebrew as we may desire.

- ESV "to the pot whose corrosion is in it"
- KJV "to the pot whose scum is therein"
- NAS "To the pot in which there is rust"
- NIV "to the pot now encrusted"
- NLT "She is a pot filled with corruption"

Although many versions translate verse 6 as the rust of the pot (following the LXX), it could also be a reference to the corruption of the meat inside the pot. Block translates it as "The cauldron whose corruption is inside it; whose corruption has not been removed! Remove it piece by piece!" (Block, 766). The point being that though the people saw themselves as God's choice cuts of meat, God saw them as putrid flesh, not the prize received from the casting of the lot.

Verse 7 explains why the "meat" has been rejected.

The OT law required that the blood of a slain animal be covered with earth (Deut. 12:16, 24; 15:23). To leave the blood in the open was to incur God's wrath. In Genesis 4:10 after Cain slayed Abel, God said to him, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground," that is, the puddle of blood was calling for vengeance.

The implication of verse 7 is that the Jerusalemites made no attempt to cover their deeds; by leaving blood in the open they showed the brazen attitudes they had toward their sins.

In verse 8 it is as if God is saying, "If you have no concern over your deeds, of leaving the blood from your sins exposed, puddled on a rock, I won't care either -- but it will be your blood I will leave!"

24:9 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "Woe to the city of bloodshed! I, too, will pile the wood high.

24:10 So heap on the wood and kindle the fire. Cook the meat well, mixing in the spices; and let the bones be charred.

24:11 Then set the empty pot on the coals till it becomes hot and its copper glows so its impurities may be melted and its deposit burned away.

Using the imagery of the cooking pot, Yahweh is pictured as the cook. He begins by heaping wood around the pot. This fire will be so hot that everything will be charred and burned (24:10). Even after the bones are charred, the pot will be placed on the fire until the pot itself glows from the heat and is purified from the defilement of the rotted meat.

The people are shown the folly of their presumption; being near the temple will not preserve them. God will use Babylon to destroy them and the city, thus purging it of its evils.

Verse 12 gives the reason for such severe actions:

24:12 It has frustrated all efforts; its heavy deposit has not been removed, not even by fire.

24:13 "Now your impurity is lewdness. Because I tried to cleanse you but you would not be cleansed from your impurity, you will not be clean again until my wrath against you has subsided.

24:14 "I the LORD have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Everything that had happened to them before, all of the judgment that they had already experienced (all of God's efforts to cleanse them of their rebellion) and all the efforts made by the prophets to bring reformation had had no effect on changing their behavior. The nation had to be cleansed; nothing more could be done.

Though God is long-suffering, patient and merciful, there comes a point where the cup of iniquity is full and God's wrath must be poured out to its full extent (24:13-14).

24:15 The word of the LORD came to me:

24:16 "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears.

24:17 Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners."

24:18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.

24:19 Then the people asked me, "Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us?"

24:20 So I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me:

24:21 Say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary-- the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword.

24:22 And you will do as I have done. You will not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners.

24:23 You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves.

24:24 Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.'

24:25 "And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well--

24:26 on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news.

24:27 At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."

Carson comments:

The second part of Ezekiel 24 (Ezek. 24:15-27) is perhaps the most wrenching passage in the entire book. Elsewhere we catch glimpses of Ezekiel the faithful prophet, Ezekiel the stern witness to the truth of God, Ezekiel the man prepared to act out extraordinary symbol-laden parables. Here we read of Ezekiel the husband. Some observations:

(1) A tiny hint of how Ezekiel viewed his wife peeps through the expression that God uses: "the delight of your eyes" (Ezek. 24:16). If Ezekiel was thirty years of age in the fifth year of the exile (Ezek. 1:1-2), then now in the ninth year (Ezek. 24:1) he could not have been more than thirty-four or thirty-five, and probably his wife was no older. Ezekiel is not the only leader of God's people to suffer devastating personal bereavement. Here he is told in advance that the blow will come (to know in advance is both a blessing and an agony), but he is also commissioned not to grieve: his silence on such an occasion, in a society known for its uninhibited expressions of grief, becomes another symbolic prophetic action.

(2) One can almost feel the massive restraint in the terse words, "in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded" (Ezek. 24:18, italics added). His silence might have been misunderstood as callousness, but in this case not for long. The people know what sort of man he is, and discern that his utter self-restraint carries a message for them (Ezek. 24:19).

(3) Ezekiel conveys to the people the significance of his silence (Ezek. 24:20-24). The delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, that on which they still pin their hopes, is the city of Jerusalem. From there, they have thought, God will break out and rescue them. But Jerusalem will be taken away, just as Ezekiel's wife has been taken away. And when this happens, they are not to weep

any more than Ezekiel has mourned the death of his wife.

The question is asked why people were not to grieve over the city. There are at least a couple of possibilities: (1) perhaps it was because the judgment was so richly deserved (cf. Ezek. 14:22-23; 1 Sam. 16:1), or (2) perhaps they will not grieve then because they will be in such shock over the events that they had just experienced.

Chapters 25-32 contain prophecies against seven nations who had had some contact with Israel. These prophecies were inserted between the chapters that begin the siege of Jerusalem (Chapter 24) and after it had fallen (Chapter 33). Although directed against foreign nations, these oracles were also part of God's message to Israel. If God judged His own people for their sin, He must judge the nations for their sins as well.

Certainly there is ample evidence that God holds all nations responsible for the sins they commit on the grand scale—he may not hold them responsible for the details of the Law of Moses, but he is certainly ready to impose judgment where there is arrogance, cruelty, aggression, covenant breaking, and rapacity. Always that proverb is true: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

Four more preliminary observations will orient us to these chapters.

(a) The number of nations treated is seven: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. The same number of nations appears in Amos. These oracles may have been uttered over an extended span of Ezekiel's ministry, but their gathering in this way into seven, and only seven, suggests the number itself is symbolic: God speaks to all the nations.

(b) Intriguingly, Babylon is not included. Probably that is because Babylon is God's agent in crushing all of these nations.

(c) By far the majority of the space is given over to the condemnation of Tyre, at that point a powerful city-state made awesomely wealthy by her trade. After Nebuchadnezzar finished with Jerusalem, the next city he successfully besieged was Tyre—and that siege lasted thirteen years. Undoubtedly the exiles would be interested to hear whether or not a city like Tyre would be held accountable in the same way that Jerusalem was.

(d) From a literary point of view, the collection of these oracles into one group, squeezed between chapter 24 and chapter 33 (when the news of Jerusalem's fall arrives in Babylon), has the effect of heightening the dramatic tension. The first two dozen chapters of Ezekiel colorfully specify what God will do. Then, before unveiling the outcome, this book records that God's justice will be meted out on all the nations. And then comes the report of what has happened to Jerusalem.

(Carson, For the Love of God, October 7 meditation)

Chapters 33-39 form a single unit and unfold some of the most vital truths of the prophecy to encourage the nation of Israel. They are dominated with messages of comfort and salvation.

Ezekiel 33 (NIV)

Verses 1-20 are so similar to chapters 3 and 18 in content.

33:21 In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!"

33:22 Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.

In Ezekiel 33:21-22 a messenger arrives at Ezekiel's house about five months after Jerusalem fell and he brings the confirmation of Ezekiel's words in 24:25-27. In only two Hebrew words (הִכָּתָה הָעִיר - Eng. = "The city has fallen") he also confirms that Ezekiel was truly a prophet of God. This is the only date in chapters 33 to 39 and Ezekiel once again resorts back to his personal dating system that started with the year of Jehoiachin's exile (see notes on 24:1-2).

The year is January 8, 585 BC. If Ezekiel 24:1 was on the same dating system, this would mean that the siege of Jerusalem took three years which all agree is way too long. However, if the present date reflects Ezekiel's method of dating and 24:1 is in accordance with the official dating system (see notes on 24:1), then the news would arrive about 5 months after an 18 month siege. Considering that one could travel from Israel to Babylon in slightly less than five months (Ezra 7:9), this explanation seems much more reasonable (otherwise one would have to assume that news didn't reach Ezekiel for over a year after the fact) (see Block, vol. 2, 254-255).

"The fall of the capital city marked a turning point in Ezekiel's ministry. The prophet had anticipated and waited for the fulfillment of his prophecies some seven years; now they are realized to his sorrow" (Feinberg, 188).

Verse 22 also marks Ezekiel's return to normal speech after God had made him a mute about 7 years earlier (see notes on 3:26), and fulfills what was predicted in Ezekiel 24:25-27: "And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well-- on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news. At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."

Chapter 33 makes a number of points worth meditating upon, as Block points out (NICOT, Ezekiel, vol. 2, 263):

First, Yahweh may have abandoned his temple, but he is still present. He stands above the earth, and the land of Israel in particular, as a witness to the deeds of humans. When they refuse to

conduct their affairs according to his standards of righteousness and morality, he acts in judgment. When the survivors of the destruction retain the old values and simply rebuild the old ways of life, God remains the enemy. For those who persist in rebellion there is no escape. The tentacles of divine judgment reach to the farthest corners of the earth as well as into the homes of those who claim to be the heirs of his promises.

Second, this oracle serves as a warning to those who claim to be the people of God not to miss or pervert the lessons of history. It is tempting for survivors of disaster to interpret their fortune as a sign of personal merit instead of an act of divine grace. But apart from commitment to the divine Lord and a spiritual sensitivity to his will, expressed in ready obedience, there is no title to the land or any other blessings of God. The privilege of being a son or daughter of Abraham must be accompanied by a commitment to walk before the Lord and to be blameless in one's conduct.

Third, God's disposition toward his land and his people is not determined by soft sentimentality. As human observers we feel sorry for the miserable remnant, trying to establish itself among the ruins of Jerusalem after the devastation of 586. We may even admire them for their determination to make the best of a deplorable situation. But God does not react this way; nor does people's pain excuse them from covenantal fidelity. Claims to the birthright must be accompanied by devotion to his will.

33:30 "But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.'

33:31 "They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain.

33:32 "Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them.

33:33 "So when it comes to pass-- as surely it will-- then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst."

The exiles will know that Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the city has come to pass. Whenever they run into people they know Ezekiel's name comes up. Though they had rejected Ezekiel for years they now want to hear the word of the Lord. People flock to him to hear him speak. Ezekiel finally appears to have a level of success for all of his efforts, but 33:31b makes it clear that their outward zeal has nothing to do with a change of heart that wants to obey God.

Ezekiel's words are like a sensual song sung with a beautiful voice that people love to listen to, but once the emotional charge is gone there is no actual transformation. Ezekiel is like a pop star or an eloquent speaker who thrills his listeners with beautiful rhetoric. But the people aren't changed; life goes on as usual.

Verse 33 ends the chapter on an ominous note. The people will come to know that Ezekiel is much more than an entertainer; his message will be vindicated.

Block comments on verses 30-33 (NICOT, Ezekiel, vol. 2, 267-268)

First, messengers of God are not called to success but to faithfulness. At the time of this prophetic event Ezekiel had been preaching among his fellow exiles for more than a decade. Although his oracles of judgment upon the city of Jerusalem and Judah had been fulfilled, few if any of his rhetorical aims had been achieved. But the prophet is undaunted, having learned not to base his security or sense of effectiveness on the response of his audience. This text warns against confusing success with skill as a communicator or the ability to charm large crowds. The preacher is not called to entertain, but is charged to speak for God.

Second, appreciation for literary flair and rhetorical skill may camouflage a hardened heart. Like the survivors back in the homeland, the exiles had failed to grasp the theological significance of the arrival of the latest band of deportees. They should have recognized the work of God and paid heed to the pronouncements of his messenger. But where hearts have fossilized, the pleas of a prophet become entertaining skits; divine passion is reduced to artistic enthusiasm. A cynical church evaluates the divine word for its aesthetic qualities, and the messenger for his ability to hold an audience

Third, those who are called by God as his spokesman may find security in him. The challenge for the communicator of divine truth is to be as gripped by the message as is the divine commissioner himself, to cast that message in as effective a form as possible, and then to commit the results to God.