

Ezekiel 12  
Psalm 90  
2 Peter 3

“The Lord Will Not Delay”

August 8, 2010

We are so much like our fathers.

They said, “The vision that he sees is for many days from now,  
and he prophesies of times far off.”  
He’s not talking about me.  
He’s not talking about now.

It’s very easy to think that way.

And not just in Jerusalem –  
but even when you are Jerusalem in Babylon!  
You might think that the exiles would be more “heavenly-minded” –  
after all, they are an oppressed minority,  
and they long to go home.  
But all they can think of is a restoration of the status quo.  
They just want to go home to Jerusalem as it was.

I fear that most evangelicals think that way today.

I fear that too often *we* think that way.  
We do not think eschatologically.  
We think nostalgically.  
We think of how things were “back in the good old days” –  
when things were “as they should be.”

In the light of the debate over California’s Proposition 8  
and the decline of moral standards today,  
it is awfully tempting to try to restore the “good old days.”

But that is how the exiles are thinking.

They are thinking back to the “good old days” of Josiah –  
the last of the good kings of Judah.  
If only we could go back to Jerusalem –  
we could restore Jerusalem to how it was in the days of Josiah –  
25 years ago –  
or for the antiquarians – in the days of David and Solomon!  
(400 years ago)

But Ezekiel says that nostalgia is *not* what it means to live as Jerusalem in Babylon.

Nowadays it seems that folks think of the “fifties” as the golden age –

Not necessarily the 1950s.

Old School Presbyterians look back to the 1850s.  
The Edwardseans wish to go back to the 1750s.  
Fans of the Puritans dream of the chance to redo the 1650s.  
And others think of Calvin’s Geneva in the 1550s.

The primitivists want to go back to the original 50s  
– when the apostles still walked the earth.

As a historian I've discovered that when you look carefully at any historical era,  
you start to realize that you should be *very* thankful that you don't live "back then."

The books of Samuel and Kings raise some serious questions for the nostalgic in Exile.  
David was an adulterer and murderer whose actions brought trouble on his house.  
Solomon was the one who started us on the path of idolatry.  
And even Josiah failed at the end and was killed in battle with the Egyptians.

Ezekiel warns the exiles not to think in terms of nostalgia.  
The past is useful for many things –  
but you don't want to go back there!

As we saw last week, the glory of the LORD has departed from the temple  
and has come to Babylon to be present with the exiles –  
and God said that he is a sanctuary for them in their captivity.

You need to keep an eschatological vision.  
You need to see that God is active in history,  
and if you would live as Jerusalem in Babylon,  
then you need to orient your life around *his* purposes for history.  
In other words, we need to develop an eschatological way of thinking –  
not a nostalgic one.

We learn how to do that in Psalm 90 – a prayer of Moses, the man of God.  
Sing Psalm 90

Children,  
You are going to die.  
I don't know when.  
It may be today.  
It may be 80 years from now.  
But unless our Lord returns first,  
you are going to die.

In Psalm 90 we ask God to teach us to number our days.  
Teach us to think about how little time we have.

Time to do what?  
What are you here for?  
Right now you may be happy just "playing."  
Is that what God put you here for?  
Playing with stuff?  
And then you die.                      Not a very satisfying story...

Or maybe you are thinking about what you want to be when you grow up.  
But even that is still a very self-centered vision.  
Maybe you've realized that you are here to raise a family – the next generation.  
Perpetuate the species – “the world must be peopled!”  
But why? A perpetual cycle of death and birth...

Why are you here?  
What is the point of this seemingly endless cycle of birth and death.

Peter deals with this in 2 Peter 3

2 Peter 3

Peter urges us to have the same eschatological perspective as Ezekiel.  
Do not think that 2,000 years is slow.  
The exact passage of time is not the point.  
“The days are near and the fulfillment of every vision.”

In Ezekiel 8-9, the accusation against Yahweh was that “he does not see; he has forsaken us.”  
Here Yahweh responds that it is Israel who does not see.  
They have eyes, but they do not see.

After all, the LORD *does* see – and because he has seen their idolatry, their abominations,  
therefore he will act and come in judgment.  
And the LORD hears the murmurings of his people as they grumble against him.  
But he will be deaf to their cries for help.

Ezekiel has seen the glory of the LORD depart from the temple.

## **1. Having Eyes, Do You See? (12:1-16)**

### **a. The Sign (12:1-7)**

Ezekiel 12:1-16 is a study in perception and blindness.

There is lots of repetition in this passage:  
“before their eyes” – 7 times  
“to see” – 5 times  
to go/bring out – 9 times  
to carry/burden – 6 times (including “prince”)  
times of day – daylight (3), evening (2), twilight (3)  
to go into exile – 7 times

*12:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.*

At the end of chapter 11,  
we heard that the exiles were the ones who would restore Israel's worship.  
This might make you think that the exiles are "better" than those who are home in Jerusalem.  
But God immediately corrects any such notion!

The exiles are not yet thinking eschatologically.  
They are nostalgic for the "good old days."  
They have eyes, but do not see.  
They have ears, but do not hear.

Why?  
Because they are a rebellious house.  
The rebellious house knows the Word of God –  
they have eyes.  
The rebellious hears the Word of God –  
they have ears.

But they don't see the point.  
The Word goes in one ear and out the other!

Has that been you?  
If so, I have good news for you:  
today, the Word of the Lord has come to you –  
God has been merciful to you, and he calls you today to repent!

In Ezekiel's day, God told the prophet to do this by enacting the coming exile:

*3 As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. 4 You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. 5 In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it. 6 In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel."*

And so Ezekiel did as he was told.

*7 And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands. I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.*

When word got out that Ezekiel was play-acting again, the crowd gathered.  
During the day he sat there with his baggage –  
but then as evening came on, he started digging through the wall of his own house

By digging through the wall, he enacts the invasion of Israel.

And then by carrying his bags into captivity, he enacts the exile of the people.  
But through all of this, Ezekiel remains stubbornly silent.  
People are wondering, “what are you doing?”  
But Ezekiel does not answer them.

**b. The Meaning (12:8-16)**

*8 In the morning the word of the Lord came to me: 9 “Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’*

Plainly they could see what he was doing:  
he is digging through a wall and carrying his bags.  
Seven times in verses 1-7 you hear that Ezekiel does these things  
“in their sight.”  
In their very questions, they demonstrate that they have eyes, but do not see.  
They do not understand the significance of what Ezekiel is doing.

And so God says:

*10 Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.’*

Note the language of the “prince.”

The king is still alive.  
Jehoiachin is a captive in Babylon.  
And so Ezekiel will not call Zedekiah “king.”  
He is merely a prince – a tribal leader.  
Israel’s true king is in exile.

(Jeremiah, who lives in Jerusalem, calls Zedekiah a king –  
because in Jerusalem, Zedekiah *is* king!  
But in Babylon, Jehoiachin is still king of Jerusalem,  
and so Ezekiel calls Zedekiah “the prince”)

In verse 10 – when it says “this oracle concerns the prince” –  
the word for “oracle” means literally “the burden.”  
Literally, verse 10 says, “the burden is the prince.”

The word “burden” does mean “oracle” – so the ESV translation is fine –  
but you miss the play on words in the Hebrew.

Not only is this oracle for Zedekiah –  
but Zedekiah is a burden (Ezekiel will never say anything good about him!)

*11 Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.' 12 And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it.*

(Here it becomes clear that the “digging through the wall” referred to the invading armies).

*He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes.*

(indeed, Zedekiah would have his eyes gouged out – Jeremiah 39)

*13 And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. 14 And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. 15 And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries. 16 But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.”*

God had warned them.

He had told them in Leviticus 26 and Dt 28 what would happen if they rebelled.

But though they had eyes – they did not see.

Though they had ears – they did not hear.

When God called Isaiah, he told him that his mission would be to make the hearts of Israel dull – to blind their eyes lest they see. (Isaiah 6)

You find similar language in Jeremiah 5 as well.

In Matthew 13 Jesus says that this is why he speaks in parables.

Sometimes people think that Jesus spoke in parables in order to make things clear.

But in fact, Jesus says that he used parables to prevent them from understanding.

Only those who have eyes to see will understand the parables –

only those who have ears to hear will hear the word of the LORD – and repent.

In Ezekiel’s day, only a few will escape – only a small remnant will be left.

A threefold judgment will come upon them: sword, famine and pestilence.

But notice in verse 16 that there are two results of the coming judgment:

1) *That they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go*

God’s judgment comes upon Jerusalem

so that they might confess their sins among the nations.

This is important.

Ezekiel is speaking to the exiles.

Jerusalem in exile needs to learn to confess their abominations.

We are in this mess because of *our* sins.

Too often we blame others.

Why is the church divided?  
It's Rome's fault!  
It's the Baptists' fault!  
It's the PCUSA's fault!

When Daniel prays in Babylon years later, he understood what Ezekiel had said:  
“we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled...  
we have not listened to your servants the prophets...  
And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God  
have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him.”  
(Daniel 9:4-ff)

We have sinned.  
The people of God in exile (Jerusalem in Babylon) must learn to confess her sins.

But there is a second thing that the people of God in exile must do:

- 2) *That they may know that I am the LORD*  
Simple.  
But profound.

88 times in the scriptures you hear the phrase: “know that I am the LORD.”  
72 times you hear it in Ezekiel.

9 times you hear it in Exodus.  
You will know that I am the LORD when I deliver you from Pharaoh.  
But in many of the instances in Ezekiel –  
You will know that I am the LORD when I send you into exile.

You know that I am the LORD by my mighty acts in history.

Too often, when people struggle with the question “how can I believe”?

We get bogged down in their personal experience.

Quite frankly, your personal experience isn't the point.

As Paul says in Philippians 2,

God has highly exalted Jesus – brought him through suffering and exile and death,  
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11)

God has demonstrated that Jesus is Lord by raising him from the dead.

And you will either acknowledge that now, and set aside all else

for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ *your* Lord (Phil 3:8),

or else you will acknowledge it when he returns in glory to judge the earth.

God has demonstrated this through his mighty acts in history.

And all of the intellectual objections in the world are merely a smokescreen  
thrown up by those who have eyes, but will not see –  
and ears, but will not hear.

Now, we need to deal patiently with people.

Because many people genuinely struggle with these things –

but we need to understand that *they are a rebellious house*.

They are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

They are trying to hide from God.

And this is what Ezekiel is driving at in the next vignette.

## **2. Man Does Not Live by Bread Alone (12:17-20)**

In verse 17, the LORD tells Ezekiel to perform another sign:

*17 And the word of the Lord came to me: 18 “Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling and with anxiety.*

But this time, he is told to explain his action immediately:

*19 And say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay. In this way her land will be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who dwell in it. 20 And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”*

In Leviticus 26 God had warned his people that this would happen.

Israel’s idolatry led to their turning away from the LORD in all other ways.

And then their violence and moral declension resulted in destruction.

This sign also strikes at the heart of nostalgia.

It would have been so easy for the exiles to look back to the days of Josiah,  
and wish for the “good old days” of the Reformation.

Or remember the stories of the wilderness – when God’s power was made known  
through his mighty deeds.

Wouldn’t it be nice if God gave us the sort of sign he gave our fathers?!

But God does not give Israel the sort of sign that they are looking for.

But the sign that God sends to the exiles is not a miraculous sign.

The sign that God sends to the exiles is the sign of bread and water,  
enacted by a lunatic prophet who doesn’t talk very often.

He sits there eating his bread and drinking his water,



trembling and quaking, as if with fear and anxiety.

Why does God give them this sign?

Because they are not thinking eschatologically.

They are not thinking forward –  
they are thinking backward.

They do not see the vision of God –  
they only see the power of Babylon.

*And you shall know that I am the LORD.*

There it is again.

When God displays his mighty power – but this time in judgment against Israel –  
they will know that he is the LORD.

If only they had learned from Moses – “man does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” –  
they would not eat their bread with fear and anxiety.

If they had a vision of the glory of the LORD – and could see what he was doing –  
then they would still be in exile – but at least they would have confidence in *him*.

*And you shall know that I am the LORD.*

Why are you worried about Proposition 8?

Why are you worried about Babylon?

By all means, as Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:

“5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.

6 Take wives and have sons and daughters;  
take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage,  
that they may bear sons and daughters;  
multiply there, and do not decrease.

7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,  
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,  
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Seek the welfare of Babylon – but don't be anxious about it.

Because our Lord has given us a sign

far greater than the anxious bread and trembling water of Ezekiel.

He has given us the sign of bread and wine –

the foretaste of the heavenly banquet!

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And our feast is not a nostalgic “memorial” of days gone by.

It is the eschatological feast – our participation in the resurrection life  
of our exalted Lord!

### 3. “The Word that I Speak Will Be Performed” (12:21-28)

Daniel Block calls verses 21-28 “two oracles against cynics.”

It would be easy to become cynical about the prophets.

They keep saying that God is going to bring judgment –  
but nothing happens!

In the same way, it would be really easy for you to become cynical about me.

You do realize, of course, that from the perspective of Babylon,  
what I am saying is nuts!

I’m telling you – don’t be anxious about the political trajectory of Babylon.

There is a heavenly king who rules over all things –  
and he will make everything right in the end.

Or as Tolkien said of Gandalf’s strategy in the Lord of the Rings:

to send the ring of power into Mordor in the hands of a witless Halfling is madness!

You see – as long as you have hope for the nostalgic solution –

you will think of the eschatological solution as crazy-talk!

These two oracles against cynicism give us two things to beware of:

#### a. Beware of a “so what?” mentality (12:21-25)

*21 And the word of the Lord came to me: 22 “Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing’?*

Judgment day is a long ways off.

For hundreds of years the prophets have warned that judgment is coming –  
and it never has!

Therefore – why worry?!

Throughout the centuries there have always been those who thought the time had come:

in the second century some said that Jesus would return in their lifetime –

others said that the year 1260 would signal the coming of the Age of the Spirit –

others thought that the revivals of the 1740s signaled the beginning of the millennium –

others said that Jesus would return in 1843 –

others said it would be 1988 –

But the days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing!

So maybe there’s nothing to it –

so what?

*23 Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord God: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.’ But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I am the Lord; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be*

*performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord God.”*

Now, it is true that God fulfilled *much* of the vision within five years.

But of course, the restoration of Israel took 70 years after that –  
and the true fulfillment of that restoration only happened 500 years later.  
“The days are near” remained true for Israel.

And of course, the basic principle remains in effect:  
there can be only one final fulfillment –  
and when that day comes, it’s all over!

That is why 2 Peter 3 says that the Lord “is not slow to fulfill his promise  
as some count slowness, but is patient toward you,  
not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (v9)

It took 2,000 years for the gospel to reach every corner of the earth.  
But even still, the work of the gospel is not yet finished.  
If you have this eschatological, Peter says in verse 11,  
then “what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?”

#### **b. Beware of a “who cares?” mentality (12:26-28)**

Because the other tendency is to say,  
“because it is going to be a long time – who cares?”

*26 And the word of the Lord came to me: 27 “Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’  
28 Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord God.”*

Peter says that our “waiting” should not be a passive twiddling of thumbs –  
but that we should be “waiting for and *hastening* the coming of the day of God,  
because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved,  
and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Peter 3:12)

How do we hasten that day?

We hasten that day by living as the kingdom of God in the midst of Babylon.  
As Peter says in v14  
“since you are waiting for these [the new heavens and new earth]  
be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”  
Peter’s vision is not that we will transform Babylon into Jerusalem.  
We will not turn the world into the church.

Rather, we live as a colony of heaven.

Not a ghetto of heaven – isolated and segregated from the surrounding culture –  
nor yet a fortress of heaven – barricaded to keep others out –  
but a colony of the heavenly empire.

Our king, after all, is the King of kings –  
and he claims the allegiance of all creatures.

And if you would see what this eschatological kingdom looks like –  
if you would see with your eyes and hear with your ears  
what this glorious vision is all about,

then look to Jesus.

Because in Jesus the time has come.

In Jesus the final judgment has already happened.

Jesus has endured the eschatological wrath and curse of God against sin.

The destruction of Jerusalem has fallen on Jesus.

He has passed through the exile – and has come through suffering and death  
to eternal glory.

And he has received all that was promised to Adam, Abraham, Israel, and David.

You see, for us, we are not waiting for God to do something.

He has already done it!

Jesus has conquered the powers of this age –  
he has cast out the prince of this age.

And because Jesus *is* sitting at the right hand of the Father,  
therefore we know that he will make all things right in the end.

And if you want to know what Christ's kingdom looks like in this age –  
look no further than the cross.

Because all of the Christian life bears a cruciform shape.

The shape of the Christian life is the shape of the cross.

If you want to hear more about that – come back tonight –

because that is what Paul is dealing with in Philippians 3!

conclude with “Sing, My Tongue, How Glorious Battle”