

04. Ezekiel 15-32



Ezekiel 15:1 - 24:27 Divine Punishment for Judah's infidelity

Ezekiel 15:6-8

‘Thus says the Lord YHWH: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have consigned to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will set my face against them; although they escape from the fire, the fire shall still consume them; and you shall know that I am YHWH, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, says the Lord YHWH.’

Ezekiel 16:1-3

‘The word of YHWH came to me: Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord YHWH to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite.’

Before it became the capital of the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Jerusalem was a Canaanite city. Its inhabitants, the Jebusites, were associated with the west Semitic people, the Amorites (see Joshua 10:6) and the Hittites, who were originally in Anatolia and spread from there into Syria and Canaan (see Genesis 23:3ff; 27:46). The Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites and Jebusites are listed among the people cleared from the land by YHWH in order to make room for Israel (see Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11). The land ‘vomited them out’(Leviticus 18:25).

Ezekiel 16:4-7

‘On the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you out of compassion for you; but you were thrown out in the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, “Live! and grow up like a plant of the field.” You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your pubic hair had grown; yet you were stark naked. I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord YHWH, and you became mine.

Ezekiel 16:9-14

‘Then I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric. I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. You were adorned with gold and silver, while your clothing was of fine linen, rich fabric, and embroidered cloth. You had choice flour and honey and oil for food. You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen. Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendour that I had bestowed on you, says the Lord YHWH.’

Ezekiel 16:15-34 - but they used these gifts to worship false gods

Ezekiel 16:34-58

They have outdone the northern kingdom and Sodom in evil.
Those to whom they have given themselves when they abandoned
YHWH will turn on them and destroy them

In the first part of chapter 16, YHWH spoke of the pledge he made to Jerusalem when he took her to himself as his bride and ‘entered into a covenant with you’(verse 8). He cannot pretend that Jerusalem has not broken the covenant, but he concludes with the assurance that he will ‘remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth’. They did not ‘remember’(verses 22, 43), but YHWH does.

Ezekiel 16:59-60, 62-63

Yes, thus says the Lord YHWH: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath, breaking the covenant; yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant ...

I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am YHWH, in order that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord YHWH.

Ezekiel 17:1-4

‘The word of YHWH came to me: Son of man, propound a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel. Say: Thus says the Lord YHWH: A great eagle, with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colours, came to the Lebanon. He took the top of the cedar, broke off its topmost shoot; He carried it to the land of Canaan, set it in a city of merchants.’

YHWH is likened to an eagle: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’ (Exodus 19:4).

As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions’ (Deuteronomy 32:11 o).

Exodus 17:9-10

‘Thus says the Lord YHWH: Will it prosper? Will he not pull up its roots, cause its fruit to rot and wither, its fresh sprouting leaves to fade? No strong arm or mighty army will be needed to pull it from its roots. Although it is planted, will it thrive? When the east wind strikes it, will it not utterly wither, wither on the bed where it grew?’

Compare Psalm 80:12-13

Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.

Ezekiel 17:22-24

‘Thus says the Lord YHWH: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. All the trees of the field shall know that I am YHWH. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I YHWH have spoken; I will accomplish it.’

God is faithful even if we aren't

Ezekiel 18:1-4

‘The word of YHWH came to me: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? (see Jeremiah 31:29; also Exodus 20:5; 34:7). As I live, says the Lord YHWH, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.’

The innocent suffer. ‘Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities’(Lamentations 5:7). This is an unsatisfactory attempt to uphold God’s justice. The problem is unsolvable for those who maintain that whatever happens is God’s doing!

Ezekiel 18:20

‘The person who sins shall die.

A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent,
nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child;
the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own,
and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.’

Exodus 18:23

‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord YHWH,
and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?’

Ezekiel 18:31-32

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord YHWH. Turn, then, and live.

Chapter 19 is a lament for the fall of the House of Judah

Chapter 20:1-20 the infidelity of those whom God rescued from Egypt.

Chapter 20:21-40 - infidelity continued

Ezekiel 20:41-44

‘As a pleasing odour I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. You shall know that I am YHWH, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your ancestors.

There you shall remember your ways and all the deeds by which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am YHWH, when I deal with you for my name’s sake, not according to your evil ways, or corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, says the Lord YHWH.’

It will be seen by all that while YHWH must punish sin, it is not people’s sin that defines his action, but his own over-riding fidelity to who he is.

Ezekiel 21:9

‘I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked’

Verse 9 takes no account of the distinctions of righteous and unrighteous argued in chapter 18. There the prophet was addressing those in exile, and calling them to repentance. Here he is addressing those in Judah who think they can escape judgment.

Chapter 22: accusations against Jerusalem

Ezekiel 22:24-29

Its **princes** within it are like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows within it.

Its **priests** have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Its **officials** within it are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain.

Its **prophets** have smeared whitewash on their behalf, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, “Thus says the Lord YHWH,” when YHWH has not spoken.

The **people of the land** have practised extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress.

Ezekiel 22:30-31

And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; I have returned their conduct upon their heads, says the Lord YHWH.

Ezekiel 23:1-49 Samaria and Jerusalem are compared to two unfaithful sisters. Jerusalem learned nothing from the fall of Samaria in 721BC, or from the Babylonian victory in 597BC.

Ezekiel 24:1-27. Words spoken against the complacency of those who escaped the deportation in 597BC. We have already been told that those who remained in Jerusalem claimed the property of the exiles (see 11:15), and boasted that they were secure in YHWH's city. We have already heard words from the prophet that warn of the folly of such an attitude. Here Ezekiel sees that the beginning of the siege of 588 will spell the final downfall of the rebellious city. His words would also dash any hopes his fellow exiles had of an imminent return from exile.

Ezekiel 24:1-2

‘In the ninth year (588BC; see 2Kings 25:1), in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of YHWH came to me: Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.’

Ezekiel 24:25-27

‘And you, son of man, on the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their heart’s affection, and also their sons and their daughters, on that day, one who has escaped will come to you to report to you the news. On that day your mouth shall be opened to the one who has escaped, and you shall speak and no longer be silent. So you shall be a sign to them; and they shall know that I am YHWH.’

News of the success of the siege and the fall of the city and its temple will be brought to Ezekiel. Then all will be made clear. Before recording the fall of Jerusalem (chapter 33), those responsible for the Ezekiel scroll insert the following oracles against the nations (chapters 25-32).

- Chapters 1-24 focus on criticism of Judah

Ezekiel 25-32

Oracles against the Nations

To this point the oracles in the Ezekiel scroll have been highly critical of Judah: the general infidelity of the people to the covenant, and the attempts of the leadership to seek security by looking to Egypt rather than YHWH to free them from the Babylonian yoke. Ezekiel is addressing his fellow exiles. They have already been through the siege that led to the capture of their city by the Babylonian army. Ezekiel is challenging them to reflect on their infidelity that led to YHWH's withdrawing his presence, and so his protection. He is also trying to stop them seeking consolation in false hopes of a quick end to their exile. In fact worse is yet to come. The folly of the leadership in Jerusalem looking to Egypt will mean a return of the Babylonian army and the destruction of their city and sanctuary. YHWH is determined, through this punishment, that they will face up to repentance and 'know that I am YHWH'.

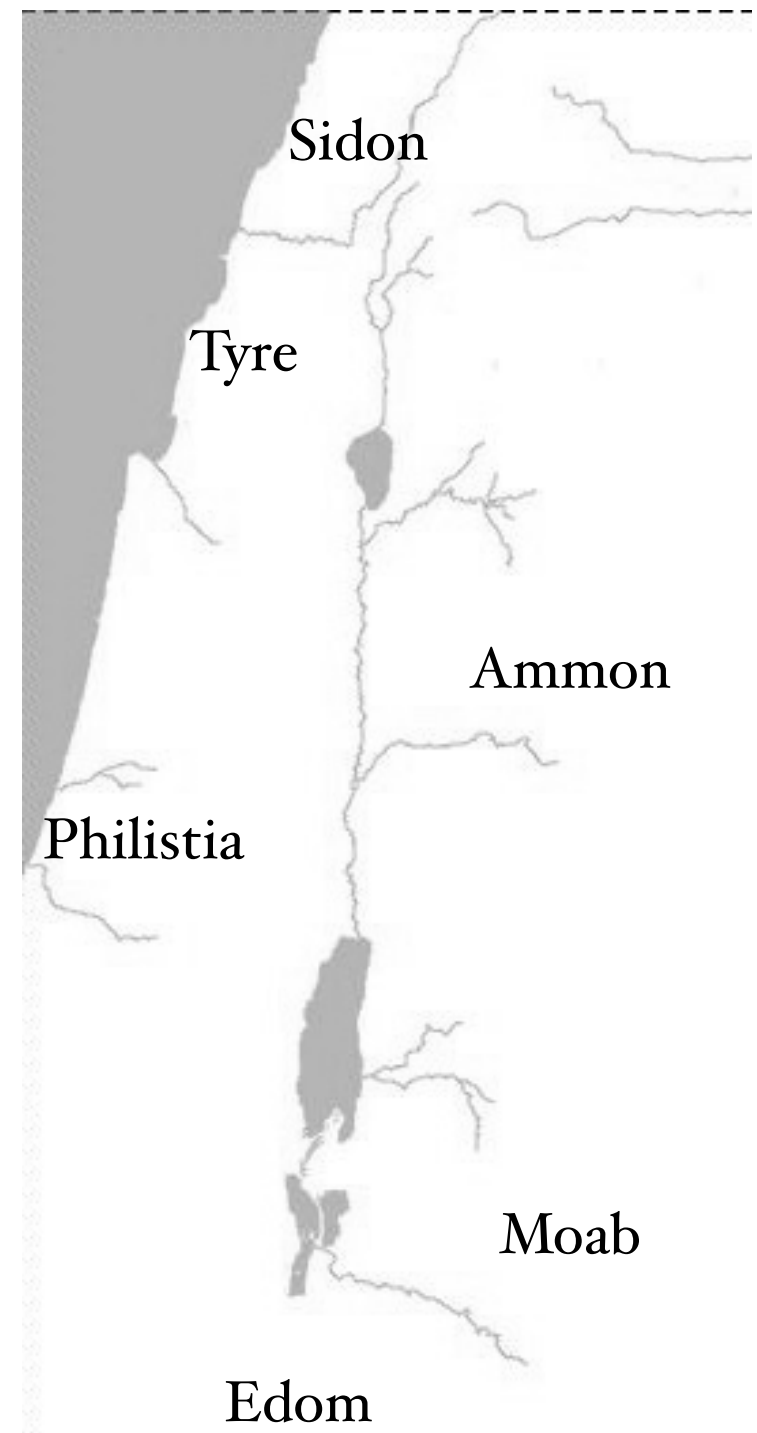
Chapter 24, with the beginning of the second siege which will lead to the destruction of Jerusalem, marks a turning point in the content of Ezekiel's oracles. The fall of the city is announced in chapter 33. The threats that have filled chapters 1-24 have been proved right. After chapter 33 the oracles speak of a restoration of the nation and a new beginning. Chapters 25-32 fill the gap between the beginning of the siege and its completion.

Those responsible for the scroll place here a series of oracles in which Ezekiel speaks of the punishment which YHWH will inflict upon the surrounding nations. To this point there has been no let up of the threat of more punishment and the need for a radical change in Judah's relationship with YHWH. However, YHWH could hardly be presented as just if Judah was the only nation that he chose to punish. While the siege is going on in the background, our gaze is deflected to contemplate God's judgment of the nations that are rejoicing in Judah's humiliation.

In chapters 25-28 we find oracles against **Ammon** (25:1-7), **Moab** (25:8-11), **Edom** (25:12-14), **Philistia** (25:15-17), **Tyre** (26:1 - 28:19) and **Sidon** (28:20-23).

Chapters 29-32 are directed against **Egypt**.

The absence of an oracle against Babylon is understandable when we remember that Ezekiel's ministry took place in Babylonia, and that, for him, Babylon was God's instrument in bringing Judah to acknowledge and repent of its infidelity.



It is not without significance that we find similar listings of oracles in the Isaiah and Jeremiah scrolls.

In the Isaiah scroll we find oracles against **Babylon** (Isaiah 13:1 - 14:27 - composed when Babylon's power was a past memory), **Philistia** (Isaiah 14:28-32), **Moab** (Isaiah 15:1 - 16:14), **Damascus** (Isaiah 17:1-3), Egypt (Isaiah 19:1-15), and **Tyre and Sidon** (Isaiah 23:1-18).

In the Hebrew Version of the Jeremiah scroll the oracles against the nations are located at the end of the scroll (chapters 46-51). In the Greek Version, however, we find them in a position parallel to that of the Ezekiel scroll: in chapters 25-31 after the oracles critical of Judah and before the oracles proclaiming salvation.

There are oracles against Egypt (Jeremiah 46:2-26; Greek 26:2-25), **Philistia** (Jeremiah 47:1-7; Greek 29:1-7), **Moab** (Jeremiah 48:1-47; Greek 31:1-44), **Ammon** (Jeremiah 49:1-6; Greek 30:17-21), **Edom** (Jeremiah 49:7-22; Greek 30:1-16), **Damascus** (Jeremiah 49:23-27; Greek 30:29-33), **Kedar** (Jeremiah 49:28-33; Greek 30:23-28), **Elam** (Jeremiah 49:34-39; Greek 25:14-19); and **Babylon** (Jeremiah 50-51; Greek 27-28).

Ezekiel

1. The oracle against **Ammon** (25:1-7; compare Isaiah 25:1-7; Jeremiah 49:1-6) presupposes the gloating of Judah's eastern neighbour over the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.

2. There are close links between the oracle against **Moab** (25:8-11; compare Isaiah 15:1 - 16:14; Jeremiah 48) and that of Edom's neighbour Ammon (25:2-5). They both shared a history of antipathy with Israel and Judah. Both are mentioned as being used by Babylon against Jerusalem in 598 (see 2Kings 24:2). Their mockery of Jerusalem at its destruction in 587 is seen as a mockery of Judah's claim to a special relationship with YHWH. It is, therefore, a mockery of YHWH, for which they share Ammon's fate.

3. The oracle against **Edom** (25:12-14). Edom was originally south of Moab to the east of the Arabah. Later, pressure from Arabia saw the Edomites move west. This produced pressure on Judah's southern border. They were considered even closer to the people of Israel in their origins than Ammon and Moab. Esau their ancestor was Jacob's brother. They shared the problems faced by their neighbours, being part of the anti-Babylonian alliance of 594 (see Jeremiah 27:3), but joining with Babylon in ravaging Judah in 587 (see Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 11-14). The oracle against Edom (25:12-14; compare Isaiah 34; Jeremiah 49:7-22) speaks of YHWH's threat of vengeance for their aggression against Judah. Verse 14 justifies action that post-exilic Judah might want to take against its southern neighbour.

4. The oracle against **Philistia** (25:15-17; compare Isaiah 14:28-32; Jeremiah 47:1-7) is closely connected with the previous oracle against Edom. The 'unending hostilities' between Israel and the Philistines date from the very beginning of Israel's emergence in the hill country of Canaan. Like Edom they took advantage of the humiliation of Judah. The oracle threatens YHWH's vengeance.

5. There are seven oracles against **Tyre** (26:1 - 28:19). Tyre joined Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and Sidon in 594 in plotting rebellion against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar attempted a blockade of Tyre. The siege lasted 13 years and the outcome was uncertain. It appears that Tyre accepted to pay tribute to Babylon, and Babylon agreed to lift the siege.

The oracles attack Tyre for its gloating over the destruction of Jerusalem. Land trade to and from Egypt passed through Palestine, and, especially under King Josiah (died 609) Jerusalem had asserted her power over this trade. Tyre delights in the fall of Jerusalem her trade rival.

6. Oracle against Sidon (28:20-23)

Oracles against **Egypt** Ezekiel 29-32

There are seven oracles against Egypt. The space given to the oracles against Egypt comes as no surprise when we consider that Egypt was the main nation opposing Babylon, and therefore, in Ezekiel's view, opposing YHWH's determination to punish Judah and bring her to repentance. Egypt represented the main temptation enticing Judah to look to a foreign alliance for security, rather than to YHWH. This was the case with Jehoiakim. Only the capture of Jerusalem in 598 could demonstrate the folly of his policy. But the lesson was not learned. Zedekiah looked in the same direction, and so brought on the destruction of the city in 587.