

# Eight Excuses

Ezekiel 8 - 19





# Big Picture Background

God is going to bring judgement on the Israelites for their sin

Around 739 BC Isaiah prophesizes about Babylon being God's instrument of punishment

*Isaiah 5:26 He whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily!*

Babylon will invade Jerusalem 3 times between 605 BC and 586 BC, finally destroying the temple in 586 BC

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> but before the 3<sup>rd</sup> invasion, God uses 2 prophets to warn Judah

594 BC - Jeremiah in Jerusalem

593 BC - Ezekiel in Babylon





# 12-year Background

In 605 BC

- the Babylonians defeat Egypt
- Jehoiakim begins to pay tribute to Babylon
- Nebuchadnezzar exiles some of Judah's nobility including Daniel
- Jehoiachin is made king

In 597 BC

- Jehoiachin rebels
- Babylon captures Jerusalem and the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of deportation to Babylon including Ezekiel
- Zedekiah becomes king

He's a bad guy but the people follow him

In 593 BC

- Ezekiel begins to prophesy





# Timeline of Ezekiel

• 593 BC	Ezekiel's Prophecy at Chebar	Ezekiel 1
• 593 BC	Ezekiel's Calling and Instruction	Ezekiel 2
• 593 BC	Ezekiel Eats the Scroll	Ezekiel 3
• 593 BC	Ezekiel Foretells Siege of Jerusalem	Ezekiel 4, 5
• 593 BC	Ezekiel's Vision of the End	Ezekiel 6, 7
• 592 BC	<b>Ezekiel's First Temple Vision</b>	<b>Ezekiel 8 - 19</b>
• 591 BC	Ezekiel Sees God Refuse the Elders	Ezekiel 20
• 591 BC	Ezekiel Prophecies against Jerusalem	Ezekiel 21, 22
• 591 BC	Ezekiel Prophecies against two Sisters	Ezekiel 23
• 588 BC	Siege of Jerusalem Begins	Ezekiel 24





# Background

After his commissioning in 593 BC, Ezekiel prophesizes about the upcoming fall of Jerusalem.

He gains attention by a very odd charade. He lays on his left side for 390 days, then on his right side for 40 days. This symbolizes the 430 years that Israel will not have access to Jerusalem. Details in Ez ch 4.

The Israelites don't like what they are hearing from Ezekiel

They don't want to believe that Jerusalem will fall

They begin to think of any reasons that enable them to ignore God's prophet Ezekiel

And they listen to false prophets who only foretell good news





# The eight excuses

1. Denial – it's not going to happen
2. It's too far in the future
3. We'll have peace
4. Blame the elders
5. We're safe because we're under the covenant
6. The Lord can't punish this generation for the sins of previous generations
7. If judgement is truly coming, there's no reason to repent
8. A new king will save us





# About these Excuses

Not all the excuses the Israelites offer up are explicitly stated. Some can only be understood by the Lord's responses.

Ez 12:21, the Lord replies to the first of these excuses with a demolishing response

As we move along through all 8 excuses, the Lord's responses will be absolutely devastating

**We should all take a lesson**





# Excuse #1: Denial – it won't happen

*12:21 The word of the Lord came to me: 22 “Son of man, what is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: ‘The days go by and every vision comes to nothing’?*

- This proverb means the things foretold by prophets always turn out to be false because life goes on unchanged
- False prophets had been victimizing Israel for centuries
- The people had become accustomed to taking such predictions with a grain of salt
- They deny a dramatic judgment awaits them
- And their confidence is based in the fact that no one can remember such a dramatic thing ever happening





# Response #1

*<sup>23</sup> Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to put an end to this proverb, and they will no longer quote it in Israel.' Say to them, 'The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled. <sup>24</sup> For there will be no more false visions or flattering divinations among the people of Israel.*

To be clear, the Lord just said there would be no more false visions or flattering divinations.

He gives more details on what He will do shortly...





# Excuse #2: It's too far in the future

The second excuse follows in v27, immediately after the Lord's response to the Excuse #1.

*12:27 "Son of man, the Israelites are saying, 'The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesizes about the distant future.'*

In the second excuse, the Israelites acknowledged the prophets spoke truth, but the fulfillment of those prophecies was so far in the future there was no point in considering them.





# Response #2

*12:25 But I the LORD will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days, you rebellious people, I will fulfill whatever I say, declares the Sovereign LORD.'"*

*13:8 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign LORD.  
9 My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.*

The Lord killed every false prophet and wiped out their names from the records of Israel.

He continues





# Response #2

*<sup>28</sup> “Therefore say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: None of my words will be delayed any longer; whatever I say will be fulfilled, declares the Sovereign LORD.’”*

In v.28 the Lord simply declares that none of His words will be delayed any longer

- He will speak to near term events and He will bring them to pass
- And then the people will not be able to claim that His word isn't relevant





# Excuse #3: We'll have peace

*13:10 “‘Because they lead my people astray, saying, “Peace,” when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash*

The people didn't like what Ezekiel was saying so instead they listened to the false prophets who said Jerusalem's future was going to be one of peace.

They were claiming that Ezekiel had been superseded by false prophets.

Excuse #3 is believing only what we prefer, and dismissing contrary evidence even when it's compelling because we don't want to accept hard truth.

We build our foundation by whitewashing a broken bit of plaster





## Response #3

*13:13 “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: In my wrath I will unleash a violent wind, and in my anger hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury. <sup>14</sup> I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it<sup>[b]</sup> falls, you will be destroyed in it; and you will know that I am the LORD. <sup>15</sup> So I will pour out my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, “The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it, <sup>16</sup> those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the Sovereign LORD.””*





# Excuse #4: Blame the former leaders

*<sup>14:1</sup> Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.*

*<sup>2</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>3</sup> “Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?*

The current corrupt elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to say God should only blame those old leaders for their idolatry and disobedience to the covenant. They expected to be excused in their own disobedience because they were only following the elder's example.

But God didn't even wait for them to speak. He had Ezekiel address them with a truly harsh pronouncement.





# Response #4

- *<sup>7</sup> “When any of the Israelites or any foreigner residing in Israel separate themselves from me and set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces and then go to a prophet to inquire of me, I the LORD will answer them myself. <sup>8</sup> I will set my face against them and make them an example and a byword. I will remove them from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*
- God gives them a hard reality check. Don't blame anyone else. He looks at each and every individual.
- He wanted them to break the stronghold of idolatry in their hearts and bring them back to Himself.
- Anyone who continues to idol worship will face judgement





# Excuse #5:

## We're safe because we're under the covenant

Excuse 5 is not explicitly stated in Ezekiel, but it was a common belief of the Israelites.

The people assumed God would preserve them from Ezekiel's predictions of coming destruction simply because they were God's people

- Being the chosen Jewish nation, they expected God would always protect them
- The other nations were falling, but Jerusalem wouldn't fall
- God would protect His people in the end





# Response #5

*16:6 ““Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, “Live!”*

In Chapter 16 the Lord uses an allegory to explain why Israel's covenant relationship wasn't a shield for the exiles but rather assured their defeat

The Old Covenant promised Israel great blessing in a future Kingdom. But it also included severe penalties for the nation should they fail to keep the terms of the Law

They were going to continue to experience the penalties





## Response #5:

Their excuse was based in denial and ignoring some obvious facts:

- First, they conveniently overlook the fact that Jews were already sitting in exile in Babylon
- Secondly, that covenant relationship is what brought God's wrath against them
- Finally, Israel made the very mistake God warned about in Deut 9. They thought they were *inherently* worthy of God's protection





# Excuse #6: The Lord can't punish this generation for the sins of past generations

Israel's excuse #5 was that the Lord's covenant with Israel prevented Him from executing judgment so they need not fear

The Lord's response was to review in detail all the sins of the previous generations which justified His judgment

But that recap generated a new excuse, #6

That new excuse was that the Lord can't punish this generation for the sins of those past generations

Excuse #6 is only reflected in the text indirectly. We understand it by the a riddle and prophecy in ch 17.

*17:1 The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell it to the Israelites as a parable.*





# Response #6

The Lord then explains both the riddle and the prophecy in Ch 17

As He interprets, He shows that the current generation is just as bad as the previous generations and that He will punish them

He points out the world would see Babylon's third defeat of Judah as simply another struggle between nations but ...

He adds a theological interpretation to these same events, for Israel's sake

The Lord would ensure that this final defeat would wipe Israel off the map for a while

The Lord said that when they see these things happen, they will know He has spoken

But He also says Israel will still have a day of glory





# Excuse #7: If judgment is truly coming, then there is no reason to repent

- There was nothing to be gained by their repentance
- They would pay for the sins of the nation regardless, since they couldn't change the past
- But God offers amazing grace!
- *<sup>21</sup> “But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die.*

The Lord's response is that repentance very much matters...because it's the only way the wicked will save their earthly lives

*<sup>21</sup> “But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die.*





# Response #7:

Still, the Israelites complain

*<sup>25</sup> “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?”*

God challenges them to look at what He does compared to what they do.

We complain, He offers amazing grace!





## Excuse #8: A king will save us

- So we come to the final excuse to ignore Ezekiel...They said that they need not fear Babylon because a new king would come and save them
- Somehow, a new king would come to the throne, in the line of David, who could vanquish the Babylonian army
- It was fantasy, of course, and it just reflects how self-deceived the people had become
- Since after two attacks already, it should have been obvious to everyone that no king could resurrect the glory of Israel under these circumstances





# Response #8

- God dismisses their hope of a new king come to save the day
- He sends them a lamentation in Ez 19 – the end of the Davidic line of kings (until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming)





What is your takeaway?