

The Final Fire: Jerusalem's End as the Divine Cooking-Pot

Ezekiel 24:1-14

24:1 And it happened—YHWH's word (came) to me, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth (day) of the month, saying: 24:2 Son of Adam / Humanity, write down for yourself (the) name of the day, this very day—Babylon's king leaned towards / against Jerusalem—on this very day! 24:3 And make a parable / proverb to / for the rebellious house! And you shall say to them, In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Put on the pot, put (it) on! And also pour water into it! 24:4 Gather her pieces into it, every good piece--thigh and shoulder--(with) choicest of bones, fill (it)! 24:5 Taking the flock's choicest (animal), and also heap the bones beneath it--boil its boiling--also cook its bones in its midst! 24:6 Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Woe! City of the blood(s)! Pot whose corrosion / rust (is) in her! And her corrosion / rust did not go out from her! Her pieces, her pieces, take out of her! A lot (for exemption) did not fall upon her! 24:7 Because her blood was in her midst; upon a shining rock she placed it. She did not pour it upon the earth, to cover dust over it! 24:8 To cause wrath to arise, to avenge vengeance, I placed her blood upon a shining / bare rock, so as not to be covered up! 24:9 Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Woe! City of the blood(s)! Also I, I will make great the pile (of wood)! 24:10 Multiply the wood! Kindle the fire! Finish (cooking) the flesh! And mix in the spices! And burn up the bones! 24:11 And set (the pot) upon its coals, empty, so that it will get hot and its copper / bronze will burn--and its uncleanness will be poured out in its midst--its corrosion / rust be finished! 24:12 (With) toils she became weary; and her many corrosions / rusts did not go forth from her! Into (the) fire, her corrosion / rust! 24:13 By your uncleanness of plan--because I cleansed you, and you were not clean from your uncleanness--I will not again cleanse you, until I cause My wrath to rest upon you! 24:14 I, YHWH, I have spoken. It has come / is coming, and I will do (it)! I will not let go / refrain, and I will not pity, and I will not be sorry! According to your ways, and according to your deeds, they judged you! (It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH! 24:15 And it happened—YHWH's word was / came to me, saying: 24:16 Son of Adam / Humanity, look at Me, taking from you your eyes' delight / pleasant thing, with a fatal blow / stroke / plague! And you shall not lament, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come (down)! 24:17 Groan! Be silent! You shall not do mourning for the dead! Bind your turban upon you, and put your sandals on your feet! And you shall not cover over your lip / moustache! And bread of (common) people you shall not eat! 24:18 And I spoke to the people in the morning; and in the evening, my wife died. And I did in the morning just as I was commanded. 24:19 And the people said to me, Will you not declare to us what these things (mean) for us, that you are doing? 24:20 And I said to them, YHWH's Word was / came to me, saying: 24:21 Say to Israel's house, In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Look at Me—profaning My sanctuary--(the) pride of your strength, (the) desire of your eyes, and object of your innermost-being's compassion! And your sons and your daughters whom you have forsaken, by the sword they will fall! 24:22 And you (plural) shall do just as I did--you shall not cover over your lip / moustache! And bread of (common) men / people you shall not eat! 24:23 And your head-dress / turban upon your heads, and your sandals on your feet! You shall not lament, and you shall not weep! And you will rot away in the iniquities of yours, and

you will groan, each one to his brother! 24:24 And Ezekiel will be for you people for a sign / portent / wonder. According to all that he did, you (plural) shall do, when it comes. And you will know that I (am) my Lord YHWH! 24:25 And you, son of Adam / Humanity, will it not on (the) day of My taking from them their place of safety, (the) rejoicing (in) their beauty, (the) desire / pleasant thing of their eyes, and (the) burden of their innermost-beings, their sons and their daughters? 24:26 On that day, the escapee / fugitive will come to you, causing ears to hear; 24:27 on that day, your mouth will be opened with the escapee--and you shall speak, and you shall not again be silent. And you shall be for them for a sign / portent / wonder; and they will know that I (am) YHWH!

24:1¹²⁴⁶

1246

Rabbi Fisch entitles **chapter 24** “Beginning of the Siege of Jerusalem.” He comments that “The chapter is prefaced by a memorable date, the tenth of the tenth month (Tebeth). This day, on which Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem, was appointed as a fast (**Zechariah 8:19**) and still remains in the Jewish calendar...After Ezekiel had written down the day of the week and the exact date on which the prophecy came to him that the city was being invested [surrounded to prevent escape], he forthwith illustrated the siege by a parable [our ‘vision-story’]...

“He returns to the figure of the caldron which the remnant in Jerusalem once used for their illusory hopes. A rusted pot with flesh is set on the fire. All the contents are consumed. The empty pot is set on the fire again so that rust and metal alike may be melted...The parable [vision-story] represents the siege: the pot is Jerusalem, the flesh is the inhabitants, and the rust is the wickedness of the people...

The latter part of the chapter [**24:15-24**] deals with the death of Ezekiel’s wife which took place on the evening of that day. The prophet was not to observe the customary rites of mourning. The import of the attitude he was to adopt towards them was that in the national catastrophe the people would be too bewildered and overwhelmed to feel personal bereavement.” (Pp. 160-61)

Reimer entitles **24:1-27** “Two Losses.” He comments that “Although not explicitly linked, the two losses recounted here almost certainly belong together, and they come at a turning point in Ezekiel’s prophetic career...

“The first loss (**verses 1-14**) is that of the city of Jerusalem—with a Babylonian siege launched, it is the beginning of the end. The second loss, that of Ezekiel’s own wife (**verses 15-24**), triggers his most poignant symbolic action. Finally (**verses 25-27**), the promise of the end is made, linking this chapter back to the prologue and forward to what lies beyond the destruction of Jerusalem.” (P. 1534)

(continued...)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי

And it happened—YHWH’s word (came) to me,

בְּשָׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִית בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי

in the ninth year,¹²⁴⁷ in the tenth month,

¹²⁴⁶(...continued)

Reimer entitles **24:1-14** “Jerusalem the Bloody Pot.” He states that “This is the last of Ezekiel’s ‘parables’ [our ‘vision stories’] (see **Ezekiel 12:22**). It uses imagery already found in the temple vision (see **Ezekiel 11:2-3**) but further developed and with greater clarity here. As the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem, it is likened to a boiling pot. A brief ‘song’ in **24:3b-5** receives two explanations in **verses 6-14**.”

Reimer comments on **24:1-5** that “The oracle is precisely dated in **verse 1**. The notation here in Hebrew does not follow the pattern found for the dates in the rest of the [**Scroll**] but corresponds exactly to that of **2 Kings 25:1** (see also **Jeremiah 39:1; 52:4**). It seems that here the date accords with the years of a king’s reign rather than years of exile (Ezekiel’s norm). It is thus equivalent to January 587 B.C.E. (Or 588 if reckoned by years of exile). The content of the ‘parable’ [vision-story] speaks for itself (in addition to **Ezekiel 11:2-3**, compare **Micah 3:3**): anticipation builds as the final stew cooks.” (P. 1534)

Hilmer notes that the day was January 15, 588 B.C.E. He comments that this is Ezekiel’s fourth date (see **1:2; 8:1** and **20:1** for the previous three dates).” (P. 1250)

Matties comments that “The end for Jerusalem is signaled by the allegory of the boiling pot (**verses 1-14**) and Ezekiel’s responses to the death of his wife (**verses 15-27**). Marking the end of the first half of the [**Scroll**] the chapter begins with a date, the day Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem began (January 15, 588 B.C.E.), and ends with an announcement that Jerusalem’s end and return to dumbness are imminent (**verse 27**; see also **3:26-27**).” (P. 1191)

1247

Rabbi Fisch notes that this is referring to the ninth year of Zedekiah, early in 587 B.C.E. The same date is given in **2 Kings 25:1**,

וַיְהִי בְשָׁנַת הַתְּשִׁיעִית לְמָלְכוֹ

And it happened in the ninth year to / of his [Zedekiah’s] reign as king,

בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בְּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ

in the tenth month, on the tenth (day) to / of the month,

בָּא נְבֻכַדְנֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came,

(continued...)

בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ לֵאמֹר:

on the tenth (day) of the month,¹²⁴⁸ saying:

¹²⁴⁷(...continued)

הוּא וְכָל-חֵילוֹ עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם

he and all his army upon / to Jerusalem,

וַיִּחַן עָלֶיהָ

and he encamped against it.

וַיִּבְנוּ עָלֶיהָ דֵיק סָבִיב:

And they built against it a siege-wall, all around (it).

Jeremiah 52:4,

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הַתְּשֻׁעִית לְמַלְכוֹ

And it happened in the ninth year of his [Zedekiah's] reign (as king),

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ

in the tenth month, on (the) tenth (day) of the month

בָּא נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל

Nebukhadrezzar, king of Babylon came

הוּא וְכָל-חֵילוֹ עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיִּחַנוּ עָלֶיהָ

he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and they encamped against it.

וַיִּבְנוּ עָלֶיהָ דֵיק סָבִיב:

And they built a siege-wall against it, (all) around.

1248

The fourth date given in **Ezekiel** (compare **2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26-27; 12:2-3, 9, 25; 17:12**) is emphasized--January 15, 588 B.C.E.--because it is the day of Nebuchadnezzar's beginning of his final siege against the City of Jerusalem, which had now become a "cooking-pot" in which all the contents would be cooked. There can be no turning back--YHWH has decided to act, and judgment will come immediately!

Rabbi Fisch comments that "The prophet was to place on record the beginning of the siege on the day the information was communicated to him. The purpose was to demonstrate the authenticity of the oracle. There was no other way of communication open to him because of the great distance between Babylon and Jerusalem." (P. 161)

Reimer notes that "Jerusalem was 880 miles...away, a journey of several weeks. [YHWH] revealed it to Ezekiel at the same time it happened." (P. 1534)

24:2 בן־אָדָם (כְּתוּב־) [כְּתַב־] לְךָ

Son of Adam / Humanity, write down¹²⁴⁹ for yourself

אֶת־שֵׁם הַיּוֹם

(the) name of the day,

אֶת־עַצְמֹת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

this very day—

סָמַךְ מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל אֶל־יְרוּשָׁלַם

Babylon's king leaned towards / against¹²⁵⁰ Jerusalem—

בְּעַצְמֵי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

on this very day!

24:3¹²⁵¹

¹²⁴⁹

The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written, כְּתוּב־”, and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” כְּתַב־, both of which mean “write down!”, with only a difference in the spelling.

¹²⁵⁰

Rabbi Fisch's translation is “has invested.” The word “invest” is used militarily to mean “surround to prevent escape”), and he states that it is literally “has leaned (his weight) towards.” (P. 161)

¹²⁵¹

Darr comments that “Yahweh commands Ezekiel to present a parable to the ‘rebellious house,’ an epithet for Israel first introduced in **2:5**. For the reader, the presence of this pejorative moniker, coupled with the almost relentlessly scathing contents of the prophet's preceding oracles and the initial reference to an infamous date in Israel's history (**verse 1**), signals more bad news for Ezekiel's audience. The following parable, perhaps a popular ditty sung by cooks preparing a sumptuous meal, is itself devoid of negative elements. With **verse 6** (introduced by ‘therefore,’ plus the messenger formula, ‘thus says the Lord God,’ and ‘Woe to the bloody city!’), however, Ezekiel identifies the cooking pot as ‘Bloodshed City’—Jerusalem (see 22:2). Just as the pot is contaminated by interior filth (a notion nowhere suggested in **verses 3b-5**), so also Jerusalem is contaminated by the blood shed in her (and consequent blood guilt). **Verses 7-8** develop this idea more fully, though in a manner unrelated to Ezekiel's pot metaphor.” (P. 204)

וּמִשְׁלַּל אֶל-בֵּית-הַמְּרִי מִשְׁלַּל

And make a parable / proverb to / for the rebellious house!¹²⁵²

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם

And you shall say to them,

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

שָׂפַת הַסִּיר שְׂפַת

Put on the pot, put (it) on!¹²⁵³

וְגַם-יִצֹק בּוֹ מַיִם:

And also pour water into it!

24:4 אָסַף נִתְחַוֶּה אֵלֶיהָ

Gather her pieces into it,¹²⁵⁴

1252

Hilmer notes that this is “the last occurrence of this condemning phrase [‘rebellious house’] in **Ezekiel** (see **2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26-27; 12:2-3, 9, 25; 17:12**). Jerusalem’s rebellion would soon be crushed.” (P. 1259)

1253

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has caldron, our “pot.” He comments that “The imagery of the caldron, previously used by the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their deceptive hopes (**Ezekiel 11:3**,

הָאֹמְרִים לֹא בְקָרוֹב בְּנוֹת בָּתַיִם

(They are) the ones saying not to build houses soon--

הִיא הַסִּיר וְאֵנַחְנוּ הַבָּשָׂר:

it (Jerusalem) is the pot, and we are the flesh!)

is now to be given its true interpretation by the prophet in the light of current events. Setting the caldron on the stove and pouring water into it, the first stage in the process of cooking, represent the siege of Jerusalem which is the preliminary to conquest.” (P. 161)

1254

(continued...)

כָּל־נֶחֱחַ טוֹב

every good piece--

יָרֵךְ וְכֹתֵף

thigh and shoulder--

מִבְּחַר עֲצָמִים מֵלֵא:

(with) choicest of bones, fill (it)!¹²⁵⁵

24:5 מִבְּחַר הַצֹּאן לְקֹיחַ

Taking the flock's choicest (animal),¹²⁵⁶

וְגַם הִוֵּר הָעֲצָמִים תַּחְתֶּיהָ

and also heap the bones beneath it--¹²⁵⁷

¹²⁵⁴(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The pieces of flesh gathered in the pot symbolize the inhabitants of the city and the fugitives from other towns who sought refuge there.” (P. 161)

Hilmer likewise states that the choice pieces are “the people of Jerusalem who thought they were spared the exile in 597 B.C.E. because of their goodness.” (P. 1259)

Matties notes that “In the pot full of choice meat, inhabitants of Jerusalem may have seen their own hopeful future.” (P. 1191)

¹²⁵⁵

Rabbi Fisch holds that the good pieces and the choice bones represent the leaders of the people and “perhaps the commanders of the forces and the fighting men.” (P. 161)

¹²⁵⁶

Rabbi Fisch comments that “the pieces of flesh are to be from the best sheep, an allusion to the presence of the aristocracy in the besieged city.” (P. 162)

¹²⁵⁷

Translations of this line vary:

King James, “and burn also the bones under it”;

Tanakh, “Also pile the cuts under it”;

New Revised Standard, “pile the logs under it”;

(continued...)

רִתַּח רִתְּחִיהָ

boil its boiling—

גַּם-בְּשֻׁלוֹ עֲצָמֶיהָ בְּתוֹכָהּ:

also cook its bones in its midst!¹²⁵⁸

24:6¹²⁵⁹ לָכֵן כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֱדַבְּרֵנִי יְהוָה

Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:¹²⁶⁰

¹²⁵⁷(...continued)

New International, “Pile wood beneath it”;

New Jerusalem, “then heap wood underneath”;

Rahfs, καὶ ὑπόκαλε τὰ ὀστᾶ ὑποκάτω αὐτῶν, “and burn the bones beneath them.”

Hilmer, commenting on the **New International** text, holds that the “wood” means “Nebuchadnezzar’s siege equipment.” (P. 1259)

¹²⁵⁸

Rabbi Fisch states that causing the water in the caldron to boil with the flesh and bones in it constitutes “a graphic allusion to the extreme ferocity of the Babylonian attack.” (P. 162)

¹²⁵⁹

Reimer comments on **24:6-9** that “Some difficult Hebrew obscures the first phase of explanation. The picture seems to be that of a corroded pot which has spoiled the broth. The reference to blood (**verses 7-9**) is unexpected and takes the imagery in a different direction, reminiscent of **22:2-4**.” (P. 1535)

Matthies likewise states that “Contrary to expectation, the poem reinterprets the metaphor by identifying the pot as the *bloody city*...The image plays on the red color of rust and blood. Since the pot is copper (**verse 11**), which does not rust, the sense may be that the blood, which is sacred and should be drained before cooking, defiles the meat. The city’s bloodshed had been, and thus will be, deliberately and shamelessly exposed on bare rock rather than drained into the earth (see also **Genesis 4:10-11; 9:4; Leviticus 17:1-14; Deuteronomy 12:23-24**).” (P. 1191)

¹²⁶⁰

Rabbi Fisch notes that in what follows, “the import of the parable’s message is stated in plain language.” (P. 162)

אוי עיר הדמים

Woe! City of the Blood(s)!¹²⁶¹

סיר אשר חלאתה בה

Pot whose corrosion / rust¹²⁶² (is) in her!

וחלאתה לא יצאה ממנה

And her corrosion / rust did not go out from her!¹²⁶³

לנתחיה לנתחיה הוציאה

Her pieces, her pieces, take out of her!¹²⁶⁴

לא-נפל עליה גורל:

A lot (for exemption) did not fall upon her!¹²⁶⁵

1261

See **Ezekiel 22:3b**,

עיר שפכת דם בתוכה

A city shedding blood in its midst–

1262

The Hebrew word **חִלְאָתָהּ**, **chel)athah**, “rust,” is translated by Rabbi Fisch as “filth.” He states that “this is a more exact rendering...than rust. Here it denotes the bloodstains of the innocent who were murdered in Jerusalem.” (P. 162) The English translations we are consulting vary from “scum” to “rust” to “encrusted,” to “deposit.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has ἰὸς, *ios* “rust / poison.”

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Here it denotes the bloodstains of the innocent who were murdered in Jerusalem.” (P. 162)

1263

Hilmer comments that this indicates “Jerusalem’s irredeemable situation.” (P. 1259) The city’s rust / corrosion would just not go out from her!

1264

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “bring it out piece by piece,” and he comments that “The population within the city will perish or be exiled not in one mass, but in sections at different times.” (P. 162)

1265

(continued...)

24:7 כִּי דָמָהּ בְּתוֹכָהּ הָיָה

Because her blood was in her midst;

עַל־צִחִיָּה סִלַּע שִׁמְתָהּ

upon a shining rock she placed it.¹²⁶⁶

¹²⁶⁵(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The contents [of the caldron, Jerusalem] are to be taken out at random, indicating that the deportation from Jerusalem will be indiscriminate.” (P. 162)

Hilmer’s translation has “without casting lots for them,” and he comments that “After the siege of Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E., perhaps the Babylonians had cast lots to see whom they would take away into exile. Not everyone would go.” (P. 1259)

¹²⁶⁶

Rabbi Fisch comments that Jerusalem’s “crimes are unpardoned because she committed them openly and unashamedly, making no attempt to conceal the blood which was shed. It is still uncovered and cries for [YHWH’s] judgment.” (P. 162) Compare **Genesis 4:10**,

וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ

And he [YHWH] said, What did you do?

קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ

(The) voice of your brother’s bloods

צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאָדָמָה:

are (sic.) crying to Me from the ground.

Job 16:18,

אֲרִץ אֶל־תִּכְסֵי דָמִי

Earth—you shall not cover up my blood!

וְאֶל־יְהִי מָקוֹם לְזַעֲקוֹתִי:

And let it not be a place for my outcry!

Rabbi Fisch tells how “The Rabbis interpreted the verse as referring to the blood of the prophet Zechariah who was murdered within the precincts of the sanctuary. The blood seethed at the appearance of the Babylonian general, and he slaughtered the members of the Sanhedrin and schoolchildren over it to stop it from seething (**Midrash to Lamentations, Proem xxiii**).” (P. 162)

Hilmer comments that “Jerusalem had brazenly left on display the blood she unjustly shed (compare **Isaiah 3:9**,

(continued...)

לֹא שִׁפְכֹתָהּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ

She did not pour it upon the earth,

לְכַסּוֹת עָלָיו עֹפָר:

to cover dust over it!¹²⁶⁷

24:8 לְהַעֲלֹת חֲמָה לְנַקָּם נָקָם

To cause wrath to arise, to avenge vengeance,

¹²⁶⁶(...continued)

הִכָּרַת פְּנֵיהֶם עֲנֹתָהּ בָּם

A look / expression of their faces testifies against them;

וַחֲטִאתֶם כְּסֹדֶם הִגִּידוּ לֹא כָחָרוּ

and their sin like Sodom they declared! They did not hide (it)!

אֹי לְנַפְשָׁם כִּי־גִמְלוּ לָהֶם רָעָה:

Woe to their innermost-being! Because they have dealt out evil for themselves!

For uncovered blood, see **Genesis 4:10; Job 16:18** and **Isaiah 26:21.**” (P. 1259)

¹²⁶⁷

Rabbi Fisch comments that “They treated human blood with even less concern than animal blood which had to be covered with dust.” (P. 163) Compare **Leviticus 17:13**,

וְאִישׁ אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

And any man from Israel’s children

וּמִן־הַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם

and from the temporary resident who resides temporarily in their midst,

אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה צִיד חַיָּה אוֹ־עוֹף אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל

who will hunt wild animals or bird(s), which will be eaten;

וְשִׁפָּךְ אֶת־דָּמֹו וְכָסָהּ בְּעֹפָר:

and he shall pour out its blood and he shall cover it with dust.

נָתַתִּי אֶת־דָּמָהּ עַל־צָחִיחַ סֹלֶעַ

I placed her blood upon a shining / bare rock,¹²⁶⁸

לְבִלְתִּי הִכְסוֹת:

so as not to be covered up!¹²⁶⁹

24:9¹²⁷⁰

1268

Rabbi Fisch comments that “In view of Jerusalem’s callousness, God will preserve the bloodstains to exact a severe penalty from those responsible.” (P. 163)

1269

Hilmer comments that “What Jerusalem had begun (**verse 7**) [YHWH] would complete through judgment.” (P. 1259) Compare **Exodus 8:32** with **Exodus 9:12**.
8:28^{Heb} / 32^{Eng}

וַיִּכְבֵּד פִּרְעֹה אֶת־לְבוֹ גַם בַּפְּעַם הַזֹּאת

And Pharaoh made his heart heavy, also this time;

וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם:

and he did not send forth the people.

9.12 וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פִּרְעֹה

And YHWH hardened Pharaoh’s heart,

וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה:

and he did not listen to them, just as YHWH said to Moses.

1270

Matties comments on **verses 9-13** that “The poem returns to the image of the cooking pot that will be heated, its contents emptied into the fire, and then heated so hot that all impurity inside will be consumed...The direct address to the city in **verse 13** suggests disillusionment with the notion of cleansing. Destruction is inevitable.” (P. 1192)

Darr comments that “A second introduction (**verse 9a**), identical to that in **verse 6a**, commences yet another interpretation of the ditty / parable, to which it more closely corresponds. Here, Yahweh assumes the cook’s role, massing a great pile of wood, kindling the fire, and boiling (down) the aromatic stew until nothing but charred bones remain in the pot. **Verses 11-12** return to the image, introduced in **verse 6**, of the filthy copper pot that, at God’s command, is placed without contents upon coals until it glows red-hot and its filth (should be) consumed. Yet even this procedure fails to cleanse the cauldron,
(continued...)

לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:¹²⁷¹

אֵי עִיר הַדָּמִים

Woe! City of the blood(s)!

גַּם־אֲנִי אֶגְדֹּל הַמְדוּרָה:

Also I, I will make great the pile (of wood)!¹²⁷²

24:10¹²⁷³ הַרְבֵּה הָעֵצִים

Multiply the wood!

הַדְּלֵק הָאֵשׁ

Kindle the fire!

הֲתָם הַבָּשָׂר

Finish (cooking) the flesh!

¹²⁷⁰(...continued)

which is finally consigned to the fire (**verse 12b**). In **verses 13-14**, Yahweh addresses Jerusalem directly: God's previous attempts to cleanse her have failed, and she will not be clean again until the Lord has expended Divine fury against her. The time is coming; God's Mind is made up and will not change, for the judgment is apropos to Jerusalem's ways and misdeeds." (Pp. 204-205)

¹²⁷¹

Rabbi Fisch comments that "God, as the supreme Judge, pronounces sentence." (P. 163)

¹²⁷²

Rabbi Fisch comments "They heaped sin on sin; God will also heap fuel for their punishment." (P. 163)

¹²⁷³

Reimer comments on **verses 10-14** that "The compounded nature of corruption and rot demands that both the pot and its contents be completely consumed (**verse 11**; see **22:15**). The first-person forms of **24:14** are repetitive and insistent: this is [YHWH's] work, and it is certain to come." (P. 1535)

וְהִרְקַח הַמִּרְקָחָה

And mix in the spices!¹²⁷⁴

וְהַעֲצִמוֹת יִחָרוּ:

And burn up the bones!¹²⁷⁵

24:11¹²⁷⁶ וְהַעֲמִידָהּ עַל-גַּחְלִיּוֹת רֵקָה

And set (the pot) upon its coals, empty,

לְמַעַן תִּחַם

so that it will get hot

וְחָרָה נְחֹשֶׁתָהּ

and its copper / bronze will burn—

וְנִתְכָה בְּתוֹכָהּ טִמְאָתָהּ

and its uncleanness will be poured out in its midst—

תִּתֵּם חֲלָאֲתָהּ:

its corrosion / rust be finished!

1274

Rabbi Fisch states that “the mixture of spices was usually added when the flesh had been sufficiently cooked (Kimchi). Rashi explains: ‘and made it into a thin mixture’; i.e. on account of the intense heat the flesh is disintegrated and reduced to a thin substance resembling powdered spices. Both interpretations are based on the common use of the root *rakach* in connection with the compounding of ointments or perfumes.” (P. 163)

1275

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Divine judgment will be executed to the full upon the guilty...So thorough will the punishment be that it will include men upon whom the nations depends: the rulers, commanders and army, who are to the people what the bones are in the human frame.” (P. 163)

1276

Hilmer comments on **verse 11** that “Jerusalem, emptied of inhabitants [‘an empty pot’] would be set to the torch, in a vain effort at purification.” (P. 1260)

24:12 תֵּאֲנִים הַלֵּאת׃

(With) toils she became weary;

וְלֹא־תֵצֵא מִמֶּנָּה רַבַּת הַלֵּאתָהּ׃

and her many corrosions / rusts did not go forth from her!¹²⁷⁷

בְּאֵשׁ חֲלֵאתָהּ׃

Into (the) fire, her corrosion / rust!

24:13 בְּטִמְאֻתְךָ זִמָּה׃

By your uncleanness of plan--

יַעַן טִהַרְתִּיךָ׃

because I cleansed you,

וְלֹא טִהַרְתָּ מִטִּמְאֻתְךָ׃

and you were not clean from your uncleanness--¹²⁷⁸

1277

Rabbi Fisch's translation "seems to imply that the men of Jerusalem made a strong effort to get rid of its 'filth'; but the thought does not suit the context which emphasizes their indifference to the evidence of their guilt. Preference may therefore be given to [the translation] 'she has wearied (Me) with toil.' Justice demands of God that He should remove the 'filth,' and this He has to do by the drastic process of melting down the 'caldron,' i.e. by destroying Jerusalem." (Pp. 163-64)

We think it is ridiculous to speak of "Justice demanding [YHWH] to cause destruction of Jerusalem." YHWH Himself is the standard of justice, and He is not subject to any law standing over Him. As Ezekiel shows in many places (especially **chapter 16**), YHWH can choose to not enforce what we humans call "the demands of justice," and instead forgive the guilty, and restore their fortunes. The same thing will be made clear when Ezekiel depicts YHWH's making a new covenant with Jerusalem / Judea. What do you think?

As we continue to read this passage, it will appear that YHWH has decided against forgiveness, and will destroy Jerusalem—which is what He did. But when He did, it was not because of His being subject to the "demands of justice."

1278

(continued...)

לֹא תִטְהַרֶנּוּ עוֹד

I will not again cleanse (you),

עַד־הִנִּיתִי אֶת־חֲמָתִי בָךְ:

until I cause My wrath to rest upon you!¹²⁷⁹

24:14¹²⁸⁰ אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי

I, YHWH, I have spoken.¹²⁸¹

¹²⁷⁸(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch quotes Davidson as stating, “Previous efforts to purify Jerusalem had been in vain, her uncleanness will go out only by fire.” He states that “This agrees with the interpretation of Jewish commentators.” Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “because I have purged you and you were not purged,” and he comments that “All efforts to bring the people to moral reformation through prophetic admonition have failed. Only the purging effect of [YHWH’s] wrath will achieve that end.” (P. 164)

¹²⁷⁹

Darr comments that “With **verse 13**, Yahweh addresses Jerusalem directly. The first two words of this verse evoke charges lodged against the city in **chapters 16, 22 and 23**: Jerusalem’s impurity is ‘depravity’ (*zimma*) a term Ezekiel uses especially for sexual depravity. The remainder of the verse, in which the verb *tihar*, ‘to cleanse’ thrice appears, further expresses Yahweh’s utter frustration at the failure of all attempts to purge Jerusalem of her impurity. It culminates with God’s declaration to the city that it will only be clean again after Yahweh’s wrath against it has been satisfied...Divine resolve is stated most emphatically in **verse 14** by means of seven verbs—three expressed positively (‘I, Yahweh have spoken’; ‘It is coming’; ‘I will carry (it) out’); three formulated as negatives (‘I will not hold back’; ‘I will not pity’; ‘I will not relent’); and a final positive construction (‘I will judge you’), accompanied by Ezekiel’s familiar notice that Yahweh’s judgment is proportionate to the city’s conduct and (wanton) ways. The oracle ends with the closing formula, ‘says Lord Yahweh.’” (P. 208)

¹²⁸⁰

Matties comments on **verse 14** that, “Piling up the resolve, [YHWH’s] last word sums up the Divine intention to destroy...Still, justice is not arbitrary; the judgment corresponds to the conduct.” (P. 1192)

¹²⁸¹

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Such is the Divine judgment upon the nation. The Hebrew uses the prophetic perfect. In fact, the process had begun with the siege of Jerusalem.” (P. 164)

בָּאָהּ וְעָשִׂיתִי

It has come / is coming, and I will do (it)!

לֹא־אֶפְרָע

I will not let go / refrain,¹²⁸²

וְלֹא־אֲחַוֶּה

and I will not pity,

וְלֹא אֲנַחֵם

and I will not be sorry!

כְּדַרְכֵיךָ וְכַעֲלֵלוֹתֶיךָ

According to your ways, and according to your deeds,

שִׁפְטוּךָ

they judged you!¹²⁸³

נֵאֻם אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה:

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!¹²⁸⁴

1282

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "I will not go back." He comments that "The verb פָּרַע, **para**(usually means 'let loose, let alone.' It is not found elsewhere in the sense used here, 'refrain.'"

1283

Rabbi Fisch's translation has the future, "shall they judge you," but in fact the verb שִׁפְטוּךָ, **shephatuk**, is qal perfect, "they judged you." Rabbi Fisch comments that "The Chaldeans who are the executors of [YHWH's] judgment will inflict upon them the punishment which is commensurate with their heinous crimes." (P. 164)

1284

Darr reflects on **verses 1-14** that "For five years, Ezekiel has pressed upon his people the unbearable, intractable, and as yet unfulfilled Divine Word that Jerusalem and its inhabitants are doomed to destruction and death. His prophecies threaten to eviscerate their most foundational and cherished beliefs about what it means to be the covenant people of Yahweh—singled out among the nations, lifted from (continued...)

¹²⁸⁴(...continued)

slavery, sustained in the desert, and gifted with a land of God's Own choosing, where a perpetual stream of Davidic kings rule and Yahweh protects both the temple and the capital city in which it stands. Was the exiles' ongoing resistance to his message mere confirmation of God's judgment that Israel was and always had been a 'rebellious house'? Or was theirs a faith so deeply rooted and stalwart that it refused to bend when the nation teetered on the brink of destruction? If the latter was true of even a few of Ezekiel's compatriots, they deserve the respect that he denies them. How might we respond if a self-proclaimed prophet in our midst persisted in flaying to the bones our most revered doctrines and relentlessly condemned the Church to death?

"In a world where people presupposed that Deities controlled the destinies of nations, Ezekiel ascribed to Yahweh the full force of Nebuchadrezzar's army. What matter that the king of Babylon was motivated by empire-building ambitions or that he attributed his victories to Marduk's unparalleled power? When the Lord's strange work was done, Nebuchadrezzar, would be judged and cut off. Such was Ezekiel's belief in Yahweh's just and unrivaled reign—a faith so deeply rooted and stalwart that it refused to bend when his nation teetered on the brink of destruction and his own people confuted [refuted] his attempts to make sense of chaos. He, too, deserves the respect that his audience so often denied him. How else could he respond when his ears were filled with Divine Words that flayed to the bones Israel's most revered doctrines and relentlessly condemned God's people to death?

"Ezekiel's parable, like those of Jesus, shows how ordinary objects and activities can become powerful vehicles for religious teachings. A copper kettle of seething stew discloses Yahweh's burning wrath against people who imagine that they are prime rib in a privileged pot. A woman works yeast into flour and discloses the mysterious, permeating power and growth of the Kingdom of God (**Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20**). In a world enamored of spectacle, revelation is everywhere present, but often overlooked.

"Jesus' parable 'works,' in part, because it suppresses conventional, negative associations with yeast (evil, impurity; see, e.g., **Mark 8:15**) and foregrounds fresh, positive ones...Ezekiel excelled at turning conventional traditions and metaphors on their heads in service to a bodacious [delightful] take on time-worn religious beliefs. In **chapters 4-24**, his task was overwhelmingly deconstructive. Modern-day, no less than ancient, sequential readers of his scroll are exhausted by his relentless assaults, though none can deny that in his efforts to be heard, Ezekiel draws from and enriches a variegated stock of beliefs, literary genres, and metaphors. Has his audience made of Jerusalem a sacred vessel? Yahweh sees the intransigent filth within it, even as Jesus perceives that the outwardly clean cup-and-dish Pharisees are filled with greed and self-indulgence (**Matthew 23:25-26**).

"Ezekiel confounds his audience's expectations not because he affirms Yahweh's sovereign control of history, but because he insists that at this moment in Israel's history, God's power and Will are manifested in the enemy troops surrounding Jerusalem, settling in for a siege. For this prophet, everything depends upon his people's acceptance that Yahweh is God, and God is just. Modern faith comm-
(continued...)

**The Death of Ezekiel's Wife
and the Destruction of the Temple (24:15-27)¹²⁸⁵**

¹²⁸⁴(...continued)

unities might wish to stand with him on those two points, yet question Ezekiel's concomitant, utterly theocentric reading of history. In a world where mighty nations run roughshod over small ones, and the blood of victims falls upon village paths and urban highways, his correlation of events with Yahweh's administration of justice can be dangerous. Yet, to the extent that we take up the task of engaging in dialogue with our religious traditions, accepting his invitation to fix a fresh eye on even our most treasured beliefs, in faith that revelation is everywhere present, if often overlooked, we become Ezekiel's true disciples." (Pp. 209-210)

¹²⁸⁵

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 15-27** "The Symbol of Ezekiel's Bereavement." Darr entitles these verses "I Am Taking From You The Delight of Your Eyes."

Ezekiel 24:15-27 marks the end of Ezekiel's harshly negative proclamation. His wife, the "desire of his eyes," is to die suddenly, on the same day that the temple in Jerusalem would be burned--but Ezekiel is forbidden to lament her death. When asked by the people what all of this meant, Ezekiel would be able to tell the people about the fall of Jerusalem. From that day when the news came of Jerusalem's fall, Ezekiel would be able to speak freely to the people in Babylonian captivity.

Matties states that "The final sign-action is the most tragic of all because it originates in Ezekiel's own experience of his wife's death...Ezekiel is told about the impending death of his wife, and is instructed not to show signs of grief or to participate in mourning rituals. The audience is, by now, ready to assume a hidden significance (**verse 19**). This is the only occasion in the [Scroll] where the audience is cited outside a speech of [YHWH]. They now recognize Ezekiel as a *sign* (**verses 24, 27**; see also **12:6**)." (P. 1192)

Reimer entitles **verses 15-24** "No Mourning for Ezekiel's Wife." He comments that "No further reference is made to a date, but the placement of this account next to the oracle marking the siege of Jerusalem is significant. Ezekiel has performed other symbolic actions (**4:1-5:17**; **12:1-28**; **21:19-20**), but this must be the most painful. It elicits no protest (compare **4:14**; **20:49**). Ezekiel has learned that there is nothing that [YHWH] cannot ask of him. He is now about 35 years old, and he is told that his wife will die, and that he will not mourn. She dies; he complies. People are disturbed (**24:19**), but Ezekiel's action prefigures what awaits his countrymen in exile with him." (P. 1535)

Reimer comments on **24:15-18** that "A bare glimpse is given of Ezekiel's inner life; there is little else like it in prophetic literature. One may wonder about the nature of marriages in ancient Judah, but Ezekiel's wife was the delight of his eyes. This list of mourning rites forbidden to him is easily understood, except for the reference to 'bread of men' (**verse 17**), which must refer to bread provided to the
(continued...)

24:15 וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And it happened—YHWH’s word was / came to me, saying.¹²⁸⁶

24:16 בֶּן־אָדָם

Son of Adam / Humanity,

הֲנִי לְקַח מִמֶּךָ

look at Me, taking from you

אֶת־מַחְמֹד עֵינֶיךָ

your eyes’ delight / pleasant thing,¹²⁸⁷

¹²⁸⁵(...continued)

bereaved (see **Hosea 9:4**). One can only imagine what this embodied oracle cost Ezekiel.” (P. 1535)
Yes, indeed!

¹²⁸⁶

Darr comments that “With the advent of Yahweh’s Word (**verse 15**) Ezekiel learns that *God* is about to perform a deadly sign act: with a single blow...the Lord will take away from the prophet ‘the delight of your eyes’...**Verse 16** says nothing of Ezekiel’s wife per se...we do not know if the prophet had children or other close relatives living with him in exile. Indeed, we would not know that he was married save for this single text. Its presence piques readers’ curiosity and reminds us just how little we know about the details of Ezekiel’s life. But the scroll as a whole, including the present passage, exhibits no interest in biographical data for its own sake.

“In ten imperative clauses, Yahweh constrains Ezekiel’s response to his impending loss. He is forbidden to mourn and weep...He must not shed tears...The following phrase prohibits public mourning rituals. Customarily, the bereaved removed their headgear in order that their hair might hang loose and be covered with dirt or ashes. Ezekiel must wear his turban...Instead of removing his sandals to go bare-foot...he must put them on. He is forbidden to cover his upper lip...a sign of disgrace in **Micah 3:7**... Finally, Ezekiel must not eat ‘the bread of men / mourning.’” (P. 212)

¹²⁸⁷

Rabbi Fisch states that “the desire of you eyes” is “Ezekiel’s wife.” (P. 164)

Hilmer comments that this means “the object of loving attention (see **verses 21** and **25**)—apparently a conventional way of referring to a man’s wife.” (P. 1260)

בְּמִגְפָּה

with a fatal blow / stroke / plague!¹²⁸⁸

וְלֹא תִסְפַּד

And you shall not lament,

וְלֹא תִבְכֶּה

and you shall not weep,

וְלֹא תָבוֹא דְמַעַתְךָ:

and your tears shall not come (down)!¹²⁸⁹

1288

Rabbi Fisch says that this means “Suddenly without her having been previously sick; perhaps a sign of the sudden fall of the temple.” (P. 164)

Hilmer states that the “blow” was “some swiftly fatal disease, one that often reached plague proportions.” (P. 1260) See **Exodus 9:14**,

כִּי בַפְעַם הַזֹּאת

Because on this occasion,

אֲנִי שֹׁלַח אֶת־כָּל־מִגְפָּתַי אֵל־לְבָבְךָ

I am sending forth all My plagues into your heart,

וּבַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּבַעַמֶּיךָ

and upon your slaves, and on your people,

בְּעִבּוֹר תֵּדַע כִּי

so that you will know that

אֵין כָּמוֹנִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

there is no one like Me in all the land!

Numbers 14:37,

וַיָּמָתוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מוֹצְאֵי דְבַת־הָאָרֶץ רָעָה

And they died—the men bringing forth a bad report of the land,

בְּמִגְפָּה לְפָנַי יְהוָה:

by the plague, before YHWH.

1289

(continued...)

24:17 הָאֲנָקָה הִם

To groan—be silent!¹²⁹⁰

מִתִּים אֲבָל לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה

You shall not do mourning for the dead!

פְּאַרְךָ חֲבוּשׁ עָלֶיךָ

Bind your turban upon you,¹²⁹¹

¹²⁸⁹(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that Ezekiel “is to suppress his natural feelings; he is not to lament nor perform any other rites of mourning over his wife’s sudden death. This unusual behavior enjoined on the prophet was to serve as an augury that the blow which was soon to befall the nation would be too stunning for normal expressions of grief.” (P. 165)

1290

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “sigh in silence.” He comments, “And not with loud cries of lament in such circumstances.” (P. 165) Compare **Wisdom of Ben Sirach 38:17**,

πίκρανον κλαυθμὸν καὶ θερμανον κοπετον

Make bitter weeping, and heat up mourning;

καὶ ποιήσουν τὸ πένθος κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν αὐτου

and make the grief according to its deserts—

ἡμέραν μίαν καὶ δύο χάριν διαβολῆς

(for) one day, and two for the sake of a slanderer.

καὶ παρακλήθητι λύπης ἕνεκα

And be comforted for the sake of (your) grief.

What do you say people should do in the midst of grief? How have you handled your grief? Can you imagine being told by God to not express grief in the event of your beloved wife’s death? Would you, could you do that? I lost my first wife of 64 years. For six months, I could hardly control my grief.

1291

Hilmer comments that “The mourner normally removed [his turban] and put dust on his head.” P. 1260) See **Joshua 7:6**,

וַיִּקְרַע יְהוֹשֻׁעַ שָׂמְלֹתָיו

And Joshua tore his garments;

וַיִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנָיו אֶרְצָה

and he fell upon his face(s) to (the) ground

(continued...)

וְנַעֲלִיךָ תַּשִּׁים בְּרַגְלֶיךָ

and put your sandals on your feet!¹²⁹²

¹²⁹¹(...continued)

לְפָנַי אֲרוֹן יְהוָה עַד-הָעֶרֶב

before YHWH's chest / ark until the evening--

הוא וְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

he and Israel's elders / officials.

וַיַּעֲלוּ עִפְרָא עַל-רֵאשָׁם:

And they raised up dust upon their head(s).

1 Samuel 4:12,

וַיִּרְץ אִישׁ-בְּנִימִן מִהַמַּעֲרָכָה

And a man of Benjamin ran from the battle-line,

וַיָּבֵא שִׁלֹה בַיּוֹם הַהוּא

and he came to Shiloh on that day.

וּמִדְּיוֹ קִרְעִים וְאֲדָמָה עַל-רֵאשׁוֹ:

And his clothes (were) torn, and dirt upon his head.

¹²⁹²

Rabbi Fisch comments that “To remove the shoes remains a sign of mourning among Jews.” (P. 165) See **2 Samuel 15:30**,

וְדָוִד עָלָה בְּמַעְלֵה הַזַּיִתִּים עֹלָה וּבֹכָה

And David (was) going up by (the) ascent of the olives, going up and crying;

וְרֵאשׁ לּוֹ חָפוּי

and his head covered,

וְהוּא הֹלֵךְ יַחַד

and he, going bare-foot.

וְכָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר-אִתּוֹ

And all the people who were with him,

חָפוּ אִישׁ רֵאשׁוֹ

they covered, each man his head.

וַעֲלוּ עֹלָה וּבְכָה:

And they went up, going up and crying.

Hilmer notes that “To remove [one's sandals] showed grief.” (P. 1260)

וְלֹא תִעָטֵהָ עַל־שָׁפָם

And you shall not cover over your lip / moustache!¹²⁹³

וְלֶחֶם אֲנָשִׁים לֹא תֹאכַל:

And bread of (common) people you shall not eat!¹²⁹⁴

1293

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The usual practice was for mourners to loosen their headgear and enshroud the head down to the upper lip.” (P. 165) Compare **Micah 3:7**,

וּבִשְׂוֵי הַחֲזוֹים וְחִפְרוּ הַקְּסָמִים

And the seers will be ashamed, and the Diviners will be disgraced.

וְעָטוּ עַל־שָׁפָם כָּלָם

And they will cover over their lip, all of them.

כִּי אֵין מַעֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים:

Because there is no answer of God!

1294

Rabbi Fisch comments that “It is still Jewish law that the first meal of mourners after the burial should be supplied to them by others.” (P. 165)

Compare the similar text in **Jeremiah 16:6-7**,

6 וּמָתוּ גְדֹלִים וְקִטְנִים בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת

And great ones and little ones will die in this land;

לֹא יִקְבְּרוּ וְלֹא יִסְפְּדוּ לָהֶם

they will not be buried, and they will not wail for them,

וְלֹא יִתְגַּדֵּד וְלֹא יִקְרַח לָהֶם:

and one will not cut himself, and will not make himself bald for them.

7 וְלֹא יִפְרֹסוּ לָהֶם עַל־אֶבֶל

And they shall not break bread over one mourning,

לְנַחֲמוֹ עַל־מֵת

to comfort him over one dying.

וְלֹא יִשְׁקוּ אוֹתָם כּוֹס תְּנַחֲמוֹת

And they shall not give them drink—(the) cup of consolations,

עַל־אָבִיו וְעַל־אִמּוֹ:

over his father and over his mother!

24:18 וַאֲדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם בַּבֹּקֶר

And I spoke to the people in the morning,¹²⁹⁵

וַתָּמֹת אִשְׁתִּי בָעֶרֶב

and in the evening, my wife died.

וַאֲעַשׂ בַּבֹּקֶר כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי:

And I did in the morning just as I was commanded.¹²⁹⁶

24:19¹²⁹⁷ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָי הָעָם

And the people said to me,¹²⁹⁸

1295

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The phrase ‘in the morning’ occurs twice, and the interpretation of the verse depends upon whether the words indicate the same point of time or not. One view is, ‘On one morning he tells the people what he had learned; in the evening his wife dies; next morning no customary signs of grief are shown by the bereaved husband (Lofthouse). Ehrlich, on the other hand, understands both to refer to the same morning, and he interprets: I spoke to the people in the morning, my wife having died the previous evening, and on the same morning carried out the instructions given to me by God. Rashi and Kimchi do not discuss the point, but Metsuath David offers the first explanation.” (P. 165) What do you think? We think the text is ambiguous at this point, and there is no way of determining exactly the time frame.

1296

Darr states that “On the morning after she dies...Ezekiel carries out Yahweh’s orders, but does not speak until the exiles have questioned him concerning his aberrant behavior (**verse 19**).” (P. 213)

1297

Reimer comments on **24:19-24** that “Such apparent indifference to bereavement was unsettling, but Ezekiel’s neighbors infer that this bizarre behavior is for their ‘benefit’ (**verse 19**). The desecration of the temple would be devastating and numbing, breaking the people’s spirit, and exile would ensue. Here too is a rare glimpse of the social devastation of exile, as the corresponding losses for Ezekiel’s fellow exiles will be ‘your sons and your daughters whom you left behind’ (**verse 21**). The recognition formula (**verse 24**)...concludes the oracle.” (P. 1535)

1298

Hilmer notes that this is “the third time that the people responded to Ezekiel’s behavior (see **12:9; 21:7**).” (P. 1260)

הֲלֹא־תִגִּיד לָנוּ מִה־אֵלֶּה לָנוּ

Will you not declare to us what these things (mean) for us,

כִּי אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה:

that you are doing?¹²⁹⁹

24:20¹³⁰⁰ וְאָמַר אֲלֵיהֶם

And I said to them,

דְּבַר־יְהוָה הָיָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

YHWH's Word was / came to me, saying:¹³⁰¹

1299

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Noticing his extraordinary behavior in not observing the traditional rites, the people suspected that it had a reason which affected them.” (P. 165)

Darr comments that “Their query is pointedly self-interested: ‘Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting in this way?’...Ezekiel’s account of his response...is cast in first-person Divine speech. Yahweh will profane Jerusalem’s sanctuary, whose significance for Israel is signaled by three appositional epithets. The first, ‘the pride of your power,’ foregrounds the people[s] trust that the temple, within which God’s Presence dwells, is inviolable...The second, [the desire of your eyes,’ links this oracle to Yahweh[s] (initially ambiguous) address to the prophet in verse 16. The temple is ‘the apple of their eyes.’ The third, ‘the longing of your life’...also bespeaks the people’s deep care for ; concern about the temple...Here, it seems, Yahweh strikes two blows to the heart of the exiles. They will lose not only the Jerusalem temple and all it represents within the orthodox theology of the day, but also their offspring.” (P. 213)

1300

Matties comments on **24:20-24** that “Ezekiel’s explanation of the analogy concerns the destruction of ‘My [YHWH’s] sanctuary’ in Jerusalem (**verse 21**). Hope cannot remain rooted in a theology of Divine Presence in the temple. The exilic community is invited to imitate Ezekiel’s response: no grief, no mourning rituals. Instead, they are to agree with Ezekiel’s announcement of [YHWH’s] judgment on Jerusalem, and acknowledge their own complicity in evil.” (P. 1192)

1301

Rabbi Fisch notes that Ezekiel “prefaces his message with the assurance that he was obeying [YHWH’s] command in what he did, and they rightly thought that his sudden loss and consequent behavior had a symbolic significance for the nation.” (Pp. 165-66)

24:21 אָמַר | לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

Say to Israel's house, In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

הֲנִי מְחַלֵּל אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי

Look at Me—profaning My sanctuary—¹³⁰²

וְאֹן עֵזְכֶם מְחַמֵּד עֵינֵיכֶם

(the) pride of your strength, (the) desire of your eyes,¹³⁰³

וּמְחַמֵּל נַפְשְׁכֶם

and object of your innermost-being's compassion!

וּבְנֵיכֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר עֲזַבְתֶּם

And your sons and your daughters whom you have forsaken,

בַּחֶרֶב יִפְלוּ:

by the sword they will fall!¹³⁰⁴

24:22 וַעֲשִׂיתֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי

And you (plural) shall do just as I did--¹³⁰⁵

1302

Hilmer notes that this profaning or desecrating YHWH's sanctuary would be "by letting Nebuchadnezzar burn it down." (P. 1260)

1303

Just as Ezekiel's wife was the desire of his eyes, so the temple in Jerusalem was the desire or delight of the Judean's eyes, the object of their affection / compassion.

1304

Rabbi Fisch comments on **verse 21**: "*I will profane My sanctuary*. By delivering it into the hands of heathens. You will suffer bereavement of *the desire of your eyes* as did Ezekiel by the death of his wife (*the desire of your eyes*, **verse 16**). *Your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind*. Apparently the Judeans who were deported to Babylon with Jehoiachin left members of their families behind in Jerusalem. The news of their death there will reach the exiles in Babylon." (P. 166)

1305

(continued...)

עַל־שָׁפֶם לֹא תַעֲטֹו

you shall not cover over your lip / moustache!

וְלֶחֶם אַנְשֵׁים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ:

And bread of (common) men / people you shall not eat!

24:23 וּפְאַרְכָּם עַל־רְאשֵׁיכֶם

And your head-dress / turban upon your heads,

וְנַעֲלֵיכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם

and your sandals on your feet!

לֹא תִסְפְּדוּ וְלֹא תִבְכוּ

You shall not lament, and you shall not weep!

וְנִמְקַתֶּם בְּעֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם

And you will rot away in the iniquities of yours,¹³⁰⁶

¹³⁰⁵(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Having heard of the death of their children in Jerusalem, the exiles will be too overcome to observe the laws of mourning, as indicated in the action of the prophet. Rashi gives an alternative explanation: the exiles will refrain from mourning from fear of the Babylonians who will be responsible for their bereavement.” (P. 166)

1306

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “you shall pine away in your iniquities.” He comments that we should compare **Ezekiel 33:10**,

וְאַתָּה בֶן־אָדָם

And you, Son of Adam / Humanity,

אָמַר אֶל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

speak to Israel’s household.

כֵּן אָמַרְתֶּם לְאָמֹר

In this way you (2nd person plural) spoke, saying

כִּי־פָשַׁעֵינוּ וְחַטָּאתֵינוּ עָלֵינוּ

since our transgressions and our sins (are) against us;

(continued...)

וְנִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו:

and you will groan, each one to his brother!¹³⁰⁷

24:24 וְהָיָה יְחִזְקָאֵל לָכֶם לְמוֹפֵת

And Ezekiel will be for you people for a sign / portent / wonder.¹³⁰⁸

¹³⁰⁶(...continued)

וּבִם אֲנַחְנוּ נִמְקִים

and in / by them we are rotting away—

וְאֵיךְ נַחִיָּה:

and how shall we live?

He quotes Lofthouse as stating, “At this point the analogy between Ezekiel’s grief and the nation’s ceases. The latter will include the bitterness of a guilty conscience—an actual consciousness of sin.” (P. 166)

Leviticus 26:29,

וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים בְּכֶם יִמְקוּ בְּעוֹנֵם בְּאֶרֶצַת אֹיְבֵיכֶם

And the ones remaining among you will waste away in their iniquity in their enemies’ lands;

וְאֵף בְּעוֹנֹת אֲבֹתָם אִתָּם יִמְקוּ:

and even in the iniquities of their fathers, they will waste away with them!

1307

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “moan one toward another.” He comments that “The exiles will not make loud lamentation, but moan, giving almost inaudible expression of their remorse (compare the use of the verb in **Proverbs 5:11-12**).” (P. 166)

11 וְנִהְיֶה בְּאַחֲרֵי־יָדְךָ

and you will groan in your later years / end,

בְּכָל־זֶמֶן בְּשָׂרְךָ וּבְגוֹמְלְךָ:

when your flesh and your body are consumed;

12 וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵיךְ שָׂנֵאתִי מוֹסֵר

and you will say, How I hated discipline / correction!

וְתוֹכַחַת נֶאֱצַן לִבִּי:

And my heart spurned reproof!

1308

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The prophet repeats the exact words which God had communicated to him; hence the mention of himself in the third person.” (P. 166)

(continued...)

כָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה תַעֲשׂוּ בְּבֹאֵה

According to all that he did, you (plural) shall do,¹³⁰⁹ when it comes.¹³¹⁰

וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה:

And you will know that I (am) my Lord YHWH!¹³¹¹

24:25¹³¹²

¹³⁰⁸(...continued)

Hilmer comments that here “The prophet speaks of himself in the third person. Else-where his name occurs only in **1:3**.” (P. 1260) We commentators mention his name again and again, whereas he mentions himself only twice!

As for Ezekiel’s being a sign to the people, compare **chapter 12, verses 1-16** and **verses 17-20**.

¹³⁰⁹

Rabbi Fisch states that this means “abstaining from signs of mourning as the prophet had done in his bereavement.” (P. 167)

¹³¹⁰

Rabbi Fisch comments that “when this comes” means “On their hearing the news of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.” (P. 167)

¹³¹¹

Rabbi Fisch comments that they will know “that the calamitous event was the decree of God.” (P. 167)

¹³¹²

Reimer entitles **verses 25-27** “Fugitive News.” He comments that “The final verses of this oracle are for Ezekiel himself, and continue the language of bereavement found in the preceding verses. The prophecy foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and the arrival of a fugitive (**verse 26**) bearing the news. Much like Zechariah’s renewed speech at the birth of John the Baptist (**Luke 1:64**), Ezekiel’s speech will be regained at this event, and again Ezekiel will be a sign to them, as he has been at the death of his beloved. This brief passage forges connections that span the [**Scroll**]. Ezekiel’s muteness began with the report in **Ezekiel 3:26**; it will be released with the arrival of the fugitive in **33:21**, when the oracles about Jerusalem resume following the foreign-nation oracles (**25:1-32:32**).” (P. 1535)

Matties comments on these three verses that “The chapter closes with three statements, each referring to *the day* as the single turning point in the [**Scroll**]: the temple is destroyed, the exiles hear the news, and Ezekiel’s mouth is opened. Until now, Ezekiel had been constrained to speak only when
(continued...)

וְאַתָּה בֶן־אָדָם

And you, son of Adam / Humanity,

הֲלוֹא בַיּוֹם קָחְתִּי מֵהֶם אֶת־מְעוֹזָם

will it not on (the) day of My taking from them their place of safety,¹³¹³

מְשׁוֹשׁ תִּפְאָרְתָם

(the) rejoicing (in) their beauty,

אֶת־מַחְמֹד עֵינֵיהֶם

(the) desire / pleasant thing of their eyes,

וְאֶת־מִשְׁאָ נַפְשָם בְּנֵיהֶם וּבָנוֹתֵיהֶם:

and (the) burden of their innermost-beings, their sons and their daughters?

¹³¹²(...continued)

instructed (3:26-27). Now, Ezekiel will begin to offer a hopeful message of transformation. The narrative begun here continues in 33:21-22.” (P. 1192)

Darr entitles **verses 25-27** “A Final Word, a New Phase.” She comments that “The fulfillment of a predictive prophecy looms large among biblical criteria for distinguishing between true and false intermediaries (see, e.g., **Deuteronomy 18:21-22**). So long as Jerusalem stood, Ezekiel’s status was open to question, his oracles concerning its demise fair game for refutation, evasion, and rationalization. **Verses 25-27** anticipate an end to that state of affairs, when both the prophet and God’s Word through him are vindicated, and Ezekiel’s ministry enters a new phase, unrestricted by the Lord’s early ban upon his acting as an arbiter between Yahweh and Israel (see **3:26-27**).” (P. 214)

Yes! And now, Ezekiel’s oracles are headed to becoming a part of Israel’s canonical scriptures!

¹³¹³

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “their stronghold, etc.” and he comments that “These terms describe the temple. It had been their *stronghold*, upon which they had relied for immunity, and *the joy of their glory*, the magnificent edifice which had been their pride. Whether the *desire of their eyes* is an epithet for the temple is uncertain. Though the Hebrew accentuation is against it, Kimchi regards the whole verse up to *their sons, etc.* as descriptive of the temple, and *their sons and their daughters* as a separate clause governed by *when I take*. Metsudath David understands *the desire...their soul* as qualifying the words that follow.” (P. 167)

24:26 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יָבוֹא הַפְּלִיט אֵלַיךָ

On that day, the escapee / fugitive will come to you,¹³¹⁴

לְהַשְׁמִיעוֹת אַזְנוֹתַי:

causing ears to hear,¹³¹⁵

24:27 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִפְתַּח פִּיךָ אֶת-הַפְּלִיט

on that day, your mouth will be opened with the escapee--¹³¹⁶

1314

Hilmer state that this escapee / fugitive was “the first of the exiles of 586 B.C.E.” (P. 1260)

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “in that day he that escapes shall come,” and Rabbi Fisch comments that “The phrase *in that day* cannot refer to the day of Jerusalem’s fall spoken of in the preceding verse, since there was a considerable interval between that event and the arrival of the fugitive (compare **Ezekiel 33:21**,

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁתֵי עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂרֵי בְחֻמְשָׁה לְחֹדֶשׁ לְגָלוּתֵנוּ

And it happened in (the) twelfth year, in the tenth (month) on the fifth (day) of the month of our exile,

בְּאֵלַי הַפְּלִיט מִירוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר

the escapee from Jerusalem came to me, saying

הִכְתָּה הָעִיר:

The city was struck down!)

Kimchi therefore understands the phrase to mean more generally ‘in that period.’” (P. 167)

1315

Hilmer notes that what they will hear from the escapee / fugitive is “about the siege– its beginning (verifying the accuracy of **verses 1-2**) and its ending.” (P. 1260)

1316

Rabbi Fisch comments that “With the tidings of the destruction of Jerusalem brought by the fugitive, the authenticity of the prophet’s message will be established.” (P. 167)

וּתְדַבֵּר וְלֹא תִשָּׁמֵט עוֹד

and you shall speak, and you shall not again be silent.¹³¹⁷

1317

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "and be no more dumb," and he comments that this means "as he was at the beginning of his career." (P. 167) Compare **Ezekiel 3:26-27**,

26 וְלִשׁוֹנְךָ אֲדַבֵּיק אֶל-חִכְךָ וְנִאֲלַמַּתָּ

And your tongue I will cause to stick to your jaw; and you will be silent / mute;

וְלֹא-תִהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ

and you shall not be to them for a man reproving!

כִּי בַיִת מְרִי הֵמָּה:

Because they (are) a house of rebellion!

27 וּבְדַבְרֵי אוֹתְךָ אֶפְתַּח אֶת-פִּיךָ

And when I speak with you, I will open your mouth.

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם

And you shall say to them,

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke--

הֲשָׁמְעוּ | יִשְׁמְעוּ

will they truly hear / listen?

וְהִחָדְלוּ | יִחָדְלוּ

And they will truly refuse (to hear / listen).

כִּי בַיִת מְרִי הֵמָּה:

Because they (are) a house of rebellion!

Ezekiel 33:22,

וַיִּדְ-יְהוָה הִיָּתָה אֵלַי בְּעֶרְב

And YHWH's hand was upon me in the evening

לִפְנֵי בּוֹא הַפְּלִיט

before the escapee's coming;

וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת-פִּי עַד-בּוֹא אֵלַי בַּבֹּקֶר

and He opened my mouth until coming to me in the morning;

וַיִּפְתַּח פִּי וְלֹא נִאֲלַמַּתִּי עוֹד:

and he opened my mouth, and I was no longer silent.

Hilmer comments that "Ezekiel's wife died the same day the temple was burned (August 14, 586 B.C.E.)." (P. 1260) See **2 Kings 25:8-9**,

(continued...)

וְהִיִּיתָ לָהֶם לְמוֹפֵת

And you shall be for them for a sign / portent / wonder;¹³¹⁸

¹³¹⁷(...continued)

- 28 וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי בְּשִׁבְעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ
And in the fifth month, on (the) seventh (day) to / of the month,
הִיא שְׁנַת תְּשַׁע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה
it (is the) nineteenth year
לְמֶלֶךְ נְבֻכַדְנֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל
to / of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,
בָּא נְבוּזַרְאֲדָן רַב־טַבָּחִים
Nebhuzaradan, captain of (the) bodyguards,
עָבַד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם:
servant of Babylon's king, (came to) Jerusalem.
- 9 וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֶת־בַּיִת־יְהוָה וְאֶת־בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ
And he burned YHWH's house and the king's house,
וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּיתֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם
and all Jerusalem's houses;
וְאֶת־כָּל־בַּיִת גָּדוֹל שָׂרָף בְּאֵשׁ:
and every great house he burned with the fire.

1318

Rabbi Fisch comments that Ezekiel's 'mission as a messenger of God will be accepted by the community in Babylon.' (P. 167)

Darr reflects over **chapter 24**, stating that "From the outset of his prophetic ministry, Ezekiel has predicted the deaths of thousands of people residing in Jerusalem and throughout Judah. He has spread before his fellow exiles horrific scenes of butchery, of bodies and bones strewn across the countryside, of personified (female) cities mutilated, raped, and slashed with swords. He has portrayed Yahweh as a Military Commander Who Orders 'His' band of assassins to slaughter 'old men, young men and young women, little children and women' (9:6 NRSV), and as an Arsonist Whose forest fire scorches the faces of everyone in its paths (20:45-48). Ezekiel's God executes justice by execution; and though the prophet asserts from time to time that innocents will be saved (e.g., 9:4), he more frequently speaks of the Lord's decimation of the entire population.

"Why, in a scroll so rife with carnage, does Yahweh's Decision to slay Ezekiel's wife, whose name and biography we do not know, stand out as especially troubling? Do we pity her—exiled from her
(continued...)

¹³¹⁸(...continued)

homeland, joined with a man whose harsh ministry took its toll upon them both, cut down in her prime? Do we recognize what her death represents? --the ever-present possibility that we or a loved one might be gone in a heartbeat, felled by stroke, or cardiovascular failure, or a highway accident? Does the particularity of her death penetrate the emotional armor we develop as a consequence of hearing about or seeing on television the remains of masses of anonymous victims? At the National Holocaust Memorial in Washington, D.C., each visitor is given a card bearing information about a European Jew whose life was imperiled or lost during World War II, in order that he or she might experience the particularity of tragedy amid a hell too immense to take in whole. Perhaps the death of Ezekiel's wife is so poignant because we can grasp it; suddenly, a beloved person nowhere condemned for any sort of sin pays the ultimate price. Yet even more than this is at stake. The text declares without equivocation or apology that Yahweh takes the prophet's wife away from him. Her blood is on God's Hands. Who fails to fear the idea that the Lord could simply view this woman as expendable, could slay her in service to a sign act, and then forbid her husband even to accord her the mourning rituals which would have honored her life, acknowledged who she was--in her own right, and for others--and permitted their community to come together in grief, despair, and hope of healing? Who fails to fear a God Who could so manipulate human emotions--Ezekiel's and the exiles'--yet remain coolly detached in the process?

“A passage like **Ezekiel 24** is susceptible to the ‘run around.’ We dodge its meaning and head instead for the **New Testament**, with its God of love and mercy. Alternatively, we claim that though the text says *this*, it really means *that*. Yahweh did not actually kill Ezekiel's wife. She died of natural causes or in some household accident. God then assuaged her husband's grief by giving her death meaning: Ezekiel's loss could be his people's gain if, by his behavior and their openness to instruction (Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting this way?), they might at last perceive the extremity of their own impending losses, acknowledge their sins, and repent.

“The problem with these ‘remedies,’ of course, is that neither honors the text, which deserves--indeed demands--a hearing on its own terms. Ezekiel might never have anticipated that the Lord would root a sign act in the death of his wife. But he everywhere insists that Yahweh controls the full sweep of history, initiating and shaping events according to God's Own Purposes. In his temple vision (**chapters 8-11**), Ezekiel witnesses the sudden death of Pelatiah, and the experience so shakes him that he spontaneously cries aloud, ‘Ah, Lord God! Will You make a full end of the remnant of Israel?’ (**11:13 NRSV**) a rare emotional outburst that puts the lie to caricatures of the prophet as emotionally detached, constitutionally incapable of compassion. There is every reason to believe that he was devastated by his wife's death, and that refraining from culturally entrenched, meaningful expressions of grief only exacerbated his pain. But there is no basis on which to argue that he would have denied God's right to conceive and carry out this sign act strategy. Ezekiel is consistent.

“That does not mean Ezekiel was right. Throughout preceding Reflections sections (see especially at **4:1-5:17**), I have urged that if we are to take seriously our biblical heritage, we must work both to understand the worldviews of its authors, including their theological presuppositions, *and* to enter into
(continued...)

וידעו כי־אני יהוה:

and they will know that I (am) YHWH!

¹³¹⁸(...continued)

dialogue with them, our discourses informed, for example, by the resources identified in John Wesley’s quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. We are not living in an ancient Near Eastern world and God does not demand that we think or believe or explain (away) as if we were. An utterly theocentric interpretation of history—which lays responsibility for all events at God’s Feet and insists that they can be directly correlated with Divine favor or punishment—may be woven into the warp and woof of ancient Near Eastern thought. But even the ancients (e.g. Job) challenged it.

“Troubling texts like this one are entrees into poignant and important discussions about life and death, about how we can think and speak of God’s power, justice, wrath, and love in relationship with creation and each of its creatures. They admit no easy answers but crucial issues seldom do. **Ezekiel 24:15-27** is an invitation to engage in serious talk. Any one who has lost, or will lose, a loved one needs to participate in the conversation.” (Pp. 214-216)