

Read the Bible in A Year: Chronological

Readings for August 16-22, 2020

We continue the events in Israel and Judah during this time in their history. If you recall, the people of Israel had been exiled to Assyria (see the purple lines on the map below), and the King of Assyria had repopulated the cities of Israel (Samaria) with gentiles from other lands (see red line below). Judah continues to be threatened by Babylon, captives have been taken from Judah to Babylon, but there still remains a presence of the Jewish people under the puppet reign of Jewish kings in Judah.



Another prophet in Jerusalem during this time was Ezekiel, who was sent to minister among the exiles. Ezekiel's prophecies are often presented in terms of visions- sometimes bizarre. We begin with the first four chapters of the Book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1-4

Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision

In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was on him.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under

their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.

As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like topaz, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not change direction as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault, sparkling like crystal, and awesome. Under the vault their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Ezekiel's Call to Be a Prophet

He said to me, "Son of man,¹ stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel— not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate. But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people.”

And he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”

Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound as the glory of the LORD rose from the place where it was standing. It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound. The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD on me. I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Aviv near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—deeply distressed.

Ezekiel’s Task as Watchman

At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself.

“Again, when a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before them, they will die. Since you did not warn them, they will die for their sin. The righteous things that person did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the righteous person not to sin and they do not sin, they will surely live because they took warning, and you will have saved yourself.”

The hand of the LORD was on me there, and he said to me, “Get up and go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.” So I got up and went out to the plain. And the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. Then the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet. He spoke to me and said: “Go, shut yourself inside your house. And you, son of man, they will tie with ropes; you will be bound so that you cannot go out among the people. I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious people. But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’ Whoever will listen let them listen, and whoever will refuse let them refuse; for they are a rebellious people.

Siege of Jerusalem Symbolized

“Now, son of man, take a block of clay, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. Then lay siege to it: Erect siege works against it, build a ramp up to it, set up camps against it and put battering rams around it. Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the people of Israel. Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the people of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the people of Israel. After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the people of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year. Turn your face toward the siege of Jerusalem and with bared arm prophesy against her. I will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your siege.

“Take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them in a storage jar and use them to make bread for yourself. You are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side. Weigh out twenty shekels of food to eat each day and eat it at set times. Also measure out a sixth of a hin of water and drink it at set times. Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel.” The LORD said, “In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them.”

Then I said, “Not so, Sovereign LORD! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No impure meat has ever entered my mouth.”

“Very well,” he said, “I will let you bake your bread over cow dung instead of human excrement.”

He then said to me: “Son of man, I am about to cut off the food supply in Jerusalem. The people will eat rationed food in anxiety and drink rationed water in despair, for food and water will be scarce. They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin.

Jeremiah 27-28, 51:59-64

Judah to Serve Nebuchadnezzar

Early in the reign of Zedekiah, son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: This is what the LORD said to me: “Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck. Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. Give them a message for their masters and say, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Tell this to your masters: With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will give all your countries into the hands of my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him. If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand. So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon.’ They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the LORD.”’”

I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, “Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they are prophesying lies to you. ‘I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD. ‘They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.’” Then I said to the priests and all these people, “This is what the LORD says: Do not listen to the prophets who say, ‘Very soon now the articles from the LORD’s house will be brought back from Babylon.’ They are prophesying lies to you. Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin? If they are prophets and have the word of the LORD, let them plead with the LORD Almighty that the articles remaining in the house of the LORD and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon. For this is what the LORD Almighty says about the pillars, the bronze Sea, the movable stands and the other articles that are left in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all

the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem—yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the things that are left in the house of the LORD and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem: They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them,’ declares the LORD. ‘Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.’”

The False Prophet Hananiah

In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people: “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’”

Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. He said, “Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.”

Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it, and he said before all the people, “This is what the LORD says: ‘In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.’” At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.

After the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.’”

Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.’” In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.

Jeremiah’s words to Seraiah

This is what the prophet Jeremiah instructed the staff officer Seraiah, Neriah’s son and Mahseiah’s grandson, when Seraiah went to Babylon with Judah’s King Zedekiah in the fourth year of his rule. Jeremiah wrote down in a single scroll all the disasters that would happen to Babylon—all these things concerning Babylon. Jeremiah said to Seraiah: When you get to Babylon, see to it that you read all these words. Then say, “LORD, you declared that this place will be destroyed and nothing will remain in it—neither human nor animal; that it will forever be a wasteland!” When you finish reading the scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates River. Then say, “In the same way, Babylon will sink and never rise again because of the disaster I’m bringing against it.”

Ezekiel 5-23

The Coming Destruction of Jerusalem

You, human one, take a sharp sword. Use it like a razor and shave your head and beard. Then use scales to divide the hair. At the end of the siege, burn one-third of it in the city. Strike another third with the sword left and right. Then scatter one-third to the wind and let loose the sword after it. From that third, take a few strands and hide them in your garment. From that hair, take yet another batch and throw it into the fire and burn it up. From there, fire will spread to the whole house of Israel.

The LORD God proclaims: This is Jerusalem! I have set her in the middle of the nations and surrounding countries. But she rebelled against my case laws and my regulations with greater treachery than these nations and surrounding countries, who also rejected my case laws and didn't follow my regulations. Therefore, the LORD God proclaims: You have become more turbulent than these nations around you because you haven't obeyed my regulations or followed my case laws. You haven't even followed the case laws of the nations around you! So now the LORD God proclaims: I myself am now against you! I will impose the case law penalties on you in the sight of the nations. Because of you, I will do what I've never done before and will never do again—all because of your detestable practices. Therefore, parents among you will eat their children, and children will eat their parents. I will impose penalties from case laws on you and scatter all that is left of you to the winds. Therefore, as surely as I live, this is what the LORD God says: Because you made my sanctuary unclean with all your disgusting practices and detestable things, I myself will shave you. I will not shed a tear. You will have no compassion, even from me. One-third of you will die of plague and waste away by famine among you. One-third will fall by the sword all around you. And one-third I will scatter to all the winds, letting loose a sword to pursue them. My anger will be complete. I will exhaust my wrath against them and take my revenge. Then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken against them in my zeal and consumed them in my wrath. I will turn you into a desolation to the ridicule of the nations all around you, in the sight of all who pass by. You will become an object of ridicule, a mockery, and a horrifying lesson to the nations all around you, when I impose penalties from case laws against you in anger, wrath, and overflowing fury. I, the LORD, have spoken. When I launch my deadly arrows of famine against you, I have released them for your destruction! I will add to your famine and completely cut off your food supply. I will send famine and wild animals against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will come to you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the LORD, have spoken.

Against the Mountains of Israel

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, face Israel's mountains, and prophesy to them. Say:

Hear the LORD God's word, mountains of Israel!
The LORD God proclaims to the mountains and hills, to the valleys and their deepest ravines:
I'm about to bring a sword against you and destroy your shrines.
Your altars will be destroyed, your incense altars broken.
And I'll make your slain fall in front of your idols.
I'll throw the Israelites' corpses in front of their idols,
and I'll scatter your bones all around your altars.
Wherever you live, cities will be in ruins, shrines made desolate, turned into utter ruin.
Your altars will be punished and then broken down.
Your idols will be demolished, your incense altars shattered, and all your works wiped out.
The slain will fall among you, and you will know that I am the LORD.

But I will spare a few.
Some of you will escape the nations' swords when you are scattered throughout the lands.
Your fugitives will remember me in the nations to which they've been banished,
how I was crushed when their roving hearts turned away from me,
and their roving eyes went after their idols.
They will loathe themselves for their treacherous acts and detestable practices,
and they will know that I am the LORD.
Not in vain have I threatened to bring this evil against them.

The LORD God proclaims:

Clap your hands, stamp your feet,
and cry "Horror" over all the detestable practices of the house of Israel.

They will fall by the sword, famine, and plague. Whoever is far off will die of plague, whoever is nearby will fall to the sword, and whoever finds refuge will die of famine. I'll satisfy my wrath against them! They will know that I am the LORD when their slain appear among their idols and around their altars, wherever they offered up pleasing aromas for all their idols, on every high hill and mountaintop, and under every lofty tree and leafy oak. Wherever they live, I will direct my power against them. I will turn the land into a greater wasteland than the Riblah desert. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

The end

The LORD's word came to me: You, human one, this is what the LORD God proclaims to the land of Israel:

An end! The end has come to the four corners of the earth!
Even now the end is upon you!
I'll send my anger against you, I'll judge you according to your ways,
and I'll turn all your detestable practices against you.
I won't shed a tear for you or show any pity.
Instead, I'll turn your ways against you, and your detestable practices will stay with you.
Then you will know that I am the LORD.

The LORD God proclaims:

Disaster! A singular disaster! Look, it comes! The end has come! Oh, yes, it has come!
It has come to you! Look, it's here! You who live on the earth, you are finally caught in your own trap!
The time has come; the day draws near. On the hills panic, not glory.
And now it's near!
Against you I will pour out my wrath, and my anger will be satisfied.
I'll judge you according to your ways, and turn all your detestable practices against you.
I won't shed a tear or show any pity when I turn your ways against you,
and your detestable practices stay with you.
Then you will know that I, the LORD, am the one who strikes you!

Look, the day! Look, it comes!
Doom has arrived! The staff blossoms, and pride springs up!
Violence rises up as a wicked master.
It isn't from others or their armies or their violence. It hasn't loomed up because of them.
The time is coming! The day draws near!

No buyer should rejoice, and no seller should mourn, because wrath overcomes the whole crowd.
The seller will never get back what was sold, even if both of them survive.
The vision concerns the whole crowd. It won't be revoked.
And the guilty ones— they won't even be able to hang on to their lives.
They have blown the horn, and everything is ready, but no one goes to battle,
because my wrath overcomes the whole crowd.
Outside, the sword! Inside, plague and famine!
Whoever is out in the field will die by the sword.
Whoever is in the city, plague and famine will consume them.
And those who flee?
They will turn up on the hills like valley doves, all of them moaning, those guilty ones.
Every hand will hang limp; urine will run down every leg.
They will put on mourning clothes, and horror will cover them.

On every face, shame; on all their heads, baldness.
They will hurl their silver into the street, and their gold will seem unclean.
Their silver and their gold won't deliver them on the day of the LORD's anger.
They won't satisfy their appetites or fill their bellies. Their guilt will bring them down.

From their beautiful ornament, in which they took pride, they have made horrible and detestable images!
Therefore, I've declared it an unclean thing for them.
I'll hand it over to foreigners as loot taken in war, to the earth's wicked ones as plunder—they will defile it!
When I hide my face from my people, foreigners will defile my treasured place.
Violent intruders will invade it; they will defile it!

Make a chain! The earth is full of perverted justice, the city full of violence.
I'll bring up the cruelest nations, and they will seize their houses.
I'll break their proud strength, and their sanctuaries will be defiled.

Disaster! It has come! They seek peace, but there is none.
One disaster comes after another, and rumor follows rumor.

They seek a vision from the prophet.
Instruction disappears from the priest, and counsel from the elders.
The king will go into mourning, the prince will clothe himself in despair,
and the hands of the land's people will tremble.
When I do to them as they have done and judge them by their own justice,
they will know that I am the LORD.

Temple vision

In the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, I was sitting in my house, and Judah's elders were sitting with me, when the LORD God's power overcame me. I looked, and there was a form that looked like fire. Below what looked like his waist was fire, but above his waist it looked like gold, like gleaming amber. He stretched out the form of a hand and picked me up by the hair of my head. A wind lifted me up between earth and heaven, and in a divine vision it brought me to Jerusalem, to the north-facing entrance of the gate to the inner court. That was where the pedestal was for the outrageous image that incites outrage. There I saw the glory of Israel's God, exactly like what I had seen in the valley. He said to me: Human one, look toward the north. So I looked north, and there, north of the altar gate, was this outrageous image in the entrance. He said to me: Human one, do you see what they are doing, the terribly detestable practices that the house of Israel is doing here that drive me far from my sanctuary? Yet you will see even more detestable practices than these.

Then he brought me to the court entrance. When I looked, I saw a hole in the wall. He said to me: Human one, dig through the wall. So I dug through the wall, and I discovered a doorway. And he said to me: Go in and see what wicked and detestable things they are doing in there. So I went in and looked, and I saw every form of loathsome beasts and creeping things and all the idols of the house of Israel engraved on the walls all around. The seventy elders of the house of Israel were standing in front of them, and all of them were holding censers in their hands. Jaazaniah, Shaphan's son, was standing right there with them, and the scent of the incense cloud rose up. He said to me: Human one, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every one of them in their rooms full of sculptured images? They say, "The LORD doesn't see us; the LORD has abandoned the land." He said to me: You will see them performing even more detestable practices. He brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the temple, where women were sitting and performing the Tammuz lament.

He said to me: Human one, do you see? Yet you will see even more detestable practices than these. He brought me to the inner court of the LORD's temple. There, at the entrance to the LORD's temple, between the porch and the altar, were twenty-five men facing toward the east with their backs to the LORD's temple. They were bowing to the sun in the east. He said to me: Do you see, human one? Isn't it enough that the house of Judah has observed here all these detestable things? They have filled the land with violence, and they continue to provoke my fury. Look at them! They even put the branch to their noses! I will certainly respond

with wrath. I won't spare or pity anyone. Even though they call out loudly to me in my hearing, I won't listen to them.

Then in my hearing he called out loudly: Draw near, you guardians of the city, and bring your weapons of destruction! Suddenly, six men came from the Upper Gate that faces north. All of them were holding weapons of destruction. Among them was another man who was dressed in linen and had a writing case at his side. When they came in and stood beside the bronze altar, the glory of Israel's God rose from above the winged creatures where he had been and moved toward the temple's threshold. The LORD called to the man who was dressed in linen with the writing case at his side: Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and mark the foreheads of those who sigh and groan because of all the detestable practices that have been conducted in it. To the others he said in my hearing: Go through the city after him, and attack. Spare no one! Be merciless! Kill them all, old men, young men and women, babies and mothers. Only don't touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary. So they began with the men, the elders in front of the temple. He said to them: Make the temple unclean! Fill the courts with the slain! Go! And they went out and attacked the city.

While they were attacking, I was left alone. I fell on my face, and I cried out, "Oh, LORD God! When you pour out your wrath on Jerusalem, will you destroy all that is left of Israel?"

He said to me: "Judah and the house of Israel are very, very guilty. The land is filled with blood, and the city is full of injustice. They have said, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD sees nothing.' I most definitely won't spare or pity anyone! I will hold them accountable for their ways."

Just then the man who was dressed in linen with the writing case at his side returned and said, "I've done just as you commanded."

At that moment I saw a form of a throne in the dome above the heads of the winged creatures. It appeared above them, and it looked like lapis lazuli. He said to the man clothed in linen: Go in between the wheels under the winged creatures. Fill your hands with fiery coals from between the winged creatures, and scatter them over the city. As I watched, he went in. Now the winged creatures were standing to the right of the temple when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner courtyard. Then the LORD's glory rose from above the winged creatures and moved toward the temple's threshold. The temple was filled with the cloud, and the courtyard was filled with the brightness of the LORD's glory. The sound of the winged creatures' wings could be heard as far as the outer courtyard. It was like the sound of God Almighty when he speaks. When he instructed the man clothed in linen to take fire from between the winged creatures and their wheels, the man went and stood next to the wheel. Then one of the winged creatures stretched a hand between the winged creatures into the fire that was between them, and he drew out some of it and set it in the palm of the one clothed in linen. He took it and went out. It appeared that the winged creatures had the form of a human hand under their wings.

Suddenly, I saw four wheels next to the winged creatures. There was a wheel next to each winged creature, and the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling topaz. It appeared that there was one shape for all four of them, as if one wheel were inside another. When they moved in any of the four directions, they moved without swerving. Whichever way the leading one faced, they moved in that direction without swerving. Their whole body—backs, hands, and wings—as well as their wheels, all four of them, were covered with eyes all around.¹³ It was these wheels that were called "the wheels" in my hearing.¹⁴ Each winged creature had four faces. The first face was that of a winged creature, the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle. The winged creatures rose up, the same creatures that I had seen at the Chebar River. When the winged creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them. When the winged creatures lifted their wings to ascend above the earth, the wheels remained beside them without swerving. When they stood still, the wheels stood still; when they rose up, they rose up with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them. Then the LORD's glory went out from above the temple's threshold and it stood over the winged creatures. While I watched, the winged creatures raised their wings and rose from the ground to leave, with their wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the temple, and the glory of Israel's God was up above them. These were the same living creatures that I saw underneath Israel's God at the Chebar River, and I realized that they were winged creatures. Each had four faces and four wings, with the form of a human hand under their wings. The forms of their faces

were the same faces that I saw at the Chebar River. Their appearance was also the same. All four of them moved straight ahead.

A wind lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the LORD's temple. There at the entrance to the gate were twenty-five men, and I saw that two officials of the people, Jaazaniah, Azzur's son, and Pelatiah, Benaiah's son, were with them.

He said to me: Human one, these men devise evil plans and give wicked advice in this city. They are the ones who say, "The nearest relatives aren't building houses. The city is the cooking pot, and we are the meat." Therefore, prophesy against them, human one, prophesy! The LORD's spirit took hold of me, and he said to me: Say, This is what the LORD God proclaims: So you have said, house of Israel! But I know what you really mean. You continue to commit murder in this city, and you fill its streets with the slain.

Therefore, the LORD God proclaims: The city is the cooking pot, and the ones you have slain in it are the meat. But you will be taken out of it. You fear the sword, so I will bring the sword against you. This is what the LORD God says! I will lead you out of the city, hand you over to foreigners, and execute judgments against you. You will fall by the sword! At Israel's borders I will judge you, and you will know that I am the LORD. The city won't be your cooking pot, and you won't be the meat in it. At Israel's borders, I will judge you. You will know that I am the LORD, whose regulations you didn't observe and whose case laws you didn't follow. Instead, you followed the case laws of the nations around you.

While I was prophesying, Benaiah's son Pelatiah dropped dead. I fell on my face, and I wailed and said, "Oh, LORD God! Are you finishing off even the Israelites who are left?"

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, when the people living in Jerusalem said, "They've gone far from the LORD, and we've been given the land as an inheritance," they were talking about your family, your nearest relatives, the whole house of Israel, all of it.

Therefore, say, The LORD God proclaims: Even though I made them go far away among the nations and caused them to scatter throughout the earth, I've provided some sanctuary for them in the countries to which they've gone.

Therefore, say, The LORD God proclaims: I will gather you from the nations, assemble you from the countries where you were scattered, and I will give you Israel's fertile land. They will enter the land, and they will remove from it all its disgusting and detestable things. I will give them a single heart, and I will put a new spirit in them. I will remove the stony hearts from their bodies and give them hearts of flesh so that they may follow my regulations and carefully observe my case laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. As for those whose hearts continue to go after their disgusting and detestable things, I will hold them accountable for their ways. This is what the LORD God says!

Then the winged creatures raised their wings. The wheels were next to them, and the glory of Israel's God was above them. The LORD's glory ascended from the middle of the city, and it stopped at the mountain east of the city. And a wind lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Chaldea, through a vision with a divine wind. When the vision I had seen left me, I spoke to the exiles about everything the LORD had shown to me.

Baggage for exile

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, you live in a household of rebels. They have eyes to see but they don't see, ears to hear but they don't hear, because they are a household of rebels. But you, human one, prepare a backpack for going into exile. In the daytime while they watch, go into exile; while they watch, go out from your place to another. Even though they are a household of rebels, perhaps they will understand. In the daytime while they watch, carry your backpack as if for exile. At twilight while they watch, go out like those who are led out to exile. While they watch, dig a hole through the wall and take your backpack out through it. While they watch, shoulder your backpack and carry it out in the dark. Cover your face so that you can't see the land, because I'm making you a sign for the house of Israel. So I did as I was commanded. I carried out my backpack like an exile's backpack in the daytime. At night I dug a hole through the wall with my hands. In the darkness, I shouldered my backpack and carried it out while they watched.

In the morning, the LORD's word came to me: Human one, has the house of Israel, that household of rebels, asked you, "What are you doing?" Say to them, The LORD God proclaims: This concerns the prince in Jerusalem, along with the entire house of Israel in it. Say: I'm your sign. Just as I have done, so it will be done to them. They will go into captivity in exile. Their prince will shoulder his backpack at night and go out. They will dig through the wall to lead him out through it, and he will cover his face so that his eyes won't see the land. But I will spread my net over him, catch him in my trap, and bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans. He won't see it, but he will die there. As for all those who are in league with him, I will scatter his helpers and all his troops to the winds and let the sword loose after them. They will know that I am the LORD when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands. But I will preserve a few of their number from the sword, famine, and plague, so that they may confess all their detestable practices among the nations where they go. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, eat your bread in trembling, and drink your water in anxious agitation. Say to the land's people, The LORD God proclaims to those living in Jerusalem regarding Israel's fertile land: As they anxiously eat up their bread and drink up their water in dismay, the land will be emptied of everything in it because of the violence of all who live there. The inhabited cities will be laid waste, the land left desolate, and you will know that I am the LORD.

Fulfillment of prophecy

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, what is this proverb of your people concerning Israel's fertile land? They say, "The days go by, and every vision vanishes." Therefore, say to them, The LORD God proclaims: I'll put an end to this proverb! It will never again be uttered in Israel. Tell them instead: The days are coming soon for the fulfillment of every vision. Never again will there be any worthless vision or deceptive divination in the house of Israel. I am the LORD! The word that I speak is the word that I will speak! It will happen and be delayed no longer. In your own days, household of rebels, I speak a word and make it happen. This is what the LORD God says!

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, the house of Israel is now saying, "The vision that he sees is for distant days; he prophesies about future times." Therefore, say to them, The LORD God proclaims: It will be delayed no longer. Every word of mine that I've spoken is certain, and it will happen. This is what the LORD God says.

Against the prophets

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, prophesy to Israel's prophets who prophesy from their own imaginations. Say, Hear the LORD's word! The LORD God proclaims: Doom to the foolish prophets who follow their own whims but see nothing. ⁴ Israel, your prophets have been like jackals among ruins. You haven't gone up into the breach or reinforced the wall of the house of Israel, so that it might withstand the battle on the day of the LORD. They saw worthless visions and performed deceptive divinations. Even though the LORD didn't send them, they said, "This is what the LORD says" and expected their word to stand. Didn't you see worthless visions? And didn't you report deceptive divinations and say, "This is what the LORD says," even though I didn't speak?

Therefore, the LORD God proclaims: Because you spoke worthless things and had false visions, I'm against you. This is what the LORD God says! I'll wield my power against the prophets, those seers of nothingness and diviners of lies. They won't be included in my people's council, or recorded in the house of Israel's official records, or enter Israel's fertile land. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Without a doubt, they led my people astray, saying "Peace" when there was no peace, and "He is building a wall" when they were the ones who laid on the plaster. Say to those who laid on the plaster that it will fall. When the flooding rains appear and I send hailstones, it will collapse, and the storm winds will break it apart. The wall will certainly fall. Won't it be said about you, "Where is your plaster now?"

Therefore, the LORD God proclaims: In my fury I will make a storm wind break out, and in my anger there will be flooding rains and hailstones in consuming wrath. I will tear down the wall on which you laid plaster. I will raze it to the ground and expose its foundation. When it falls, you will be destroyed with it, and you will know

that I am the LORD. I will exhaust my fury on the wall and on those who laid plaster on it. Then I will say to you, "Where is the wall?" and "Where are those who plastered it, those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and envisioned peace when there was no peace?" This is what the LORD God says!

You, human one, face the daughters of your people, those women who prophesy from their imaginations. Prophecy against them and say, The LORD God proclaims: Doom to the women who sew bands on every wrist and make veils for heads of all sizes to entrap human lives. Will you ensnare my people's lives but preserve your own? When you degrade me to my people for handfuls of barley and bread crumbs, you mislead my gullible people, and you bring about the death of those who shouldn't die and keep alive those who shouldn't live.

Therefore, the LORD God proclaims: I'm against the bands that you use to trap human lives. I will tear them from your arms, and I will set free the lives that you've trapped like birds. I will tear off your veils and snatch my people out of your clutches. They will be prey in your clutches no longer. Then you will know that I am the LORD. You hurt the righteous with slander—I didn't wound them!—and you strengthened the hands of the wicked so that they survived without changing their evil ways! Therefore, you will no longer see empty visions or perform divinations. I will rescue my people from your clutches, and you will know that I am the LORD.

False devotion

When some of the elders of the house of Israel came to sit in my presence, the LORD's word came to me: Human one, these men decide on their own to set up their idols, so the cause of their downfall is right in front of them. Why should I allow them to ask me anything? Therefore, speak to them and tell them, The LORD God proclaims: If anyone from the house of Israel decides on his own to set up his idols and puts the cause of his downfall right in front of him, but then comes to the prophet, I, the LORD, will require an answer from him through his many idols. So I'll seize the hearts of the house of Israel, whose idols have made them all strangers to me.

Therefore, say to the house of Israel, The LORD God proclaims: Come back! Turn away from your idols and from all your detestable practices. Turn away! Or anyone of the house of Israel or any immigrant in Israel who becomes estranged from me by deciding on their own to set up their idols and puts the cause of their downfall right in front of them, but then comes to the prophet to ask me something through him, I, the LORD, will require an answer. I will confront that one. I will set them up as a sign and an object lesson, and I will cut them off from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

As for the prophet who was seduced into speaking a word, even though it was I, the LORD, who seduced that prophet, I will use my power against him and cut him off completely from my people Israel. The prophet and the inquirer alike will bear their guilt, so that the house of Israel won't stray away from me again or make themselves impure with any of their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God. This is what the LORD God says!

Failed request

The LORD's word came to me: ¹³ Human one, suppose a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, so that I use my power against it, break off its food supply, let famine run rampant, and eliminate both humans and animals. If these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, lived there, their lives alone would be saved because they were righteous. This is what the LORD God says. Or suppose I allow wild animals to roam through the land, and it becomes so wild that no one can live there or even travel through it on account of the wild animals. If these three men lived there, as surely as I live, proclaims the LORD God, they wouldn't be able to rescue even their sons or daughters. They alone would be rescued, but the land would become a ruin. Or suppose I bring a sword against that land and command the sword to pass through and eliminate both humans and animals. If these three men lived there, as surely as I live, proclaims the LORD God, they wouldn't be able to rescue even their sons or daughters. They alone would be rescued. Or suppose I send a plague against that land and pour out my fury on it. With great bloodshed I would eliminate both humans and animals. If Noah, Daniel, and Job

lived there, as surely as I live, proclaims the LORD God, they wouldn't be able to rescue either sons or daughters. But they would save their lives because they were righteous.

The LORD God proclaims: How much more if I send all four of these terrible acts of judgment—sword, famine, wild animals, and plague—against Jerusalem, to eliminate both humans and animals? Yet a few survivors will be left. Sons and daughters will be brought out to you. When you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the evil that I inflicted on Jerusalem, for all that I brought against it. Seeing their ways and their deeds will bring you some consolation, because then you will understand what I've done, and that I didn't do any of these things without cause. This is what the LORD God says.

The vine's wood

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, how is the vine's wood better than the wood of all the trees in the forest? Can you make anything useful from its wood? Can you make a peg from it and hang objects on it? If not, can it be used as firewood? Fire would consume its two ends, but its middle part would only get charred. So is it useful for anything? Look, even when it was whole, it was worthless. Now that the fire has consumed it, and it is charred, it's even more useless.

Therefore, the LORD God proclaims: Of all the trees in the forest, I have decreed that the vine's wood is destined to be consumed by fire. So also have I decreed for those who live in Jerusalem, and I have confronted them. They may try to go out from the fire, but the fire will consume them. You will know that I am the LORD, because I confronted them. I will turn the land into a ruin because they acted faithlessly, proclaims the LORD God.

Jerusalem's unfaithfulness

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, show Jerusalem her detestable practices. Say, The LORD God proclaims to Jerusalem: By origin and birth you are from the land of Canaan. Your father was an Amorite, your mother a Hittite. This is how you were treated on the day you were born: Your umbilical cord wasn't cut, you weren't washed clean with water or rubbed with salt, and you weren't wrapped in blankets. No one took pity or cared enough to do any of these things for you. You were despised on the day of your birth and thrown out on the open field. When I happened to come by, I saw you flailing about in your blood. I said to you while you were still bloody, "Live!" I helped you to flourish like a young plant in the field, and you grew tall and became wonderfully endowed. Your breasts were firm, your hair beautifully thick. And you were completely naked.

When I passed by you, I realized that you were ready for love. So I spread my cloak over you and covered your nakedness. I made a solemn promise and entered into a covenant with you, and you became mine. This is what the LORD God says. Then I washed you with water, rinsed off your blood, and poured oil on you. I clothed you with colorful garments, put fine sandals on you, wrapped your head in linen, and covered you with jewels. I adorned you with fine jewelry and put bracelets on your wrists and a necklace around your neck. I put a ring in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. I adorned you with gold and silver, and your garments were made of the finest linen and brocade. You ate the finest flour, honey, and oil. You became very beautiful, fit for royalty. Among the nations you were famous for your beauty. It was perfect because of the splendor that I had given you. This is what the LORD God says.

But you trusted in your beauty and traded on your fame. At every opportunity, you seduced all who came by. You took some of your clothing to make colorful shrines and prostituted yourself in them. You took the beautiful gold and silver jewelry that I had given to you, and you made male images for yourself and prostituted yourself with them. You took your fine garments and clothed them. You set my oil and incense before them. You set my food that I had given you to eat—fine wheat, oil, and honey—before them as a pleasing aroma. This is what the LORD God says. You took your sons and daughters, which you had borne to me, and you sacrificed these to them so they could consume them. Was this promiscuity of yours a small thing? You slaughtered my sons and placed them in the fire for them! In all your detestable practices and promiscuities, you didn't remember the days of your infancy when you lay completely naked, flailing about in your blood.

After all your wickedness—doom, doom to you, proclaims the LORD God— you built a pavilion for yourself and set up platforms in every square. At every crossroad you built your platform and degraded your beauty by spreading your legs to all comers. And so you encouraged even more promiscuity. You prostituted yourself with the Egyptians, your neighbors with the large sexual organs, and as you added to your seductions, you provoked me to anger. So I used my power against you, cut off your allowance, and gave you up to the passions of the Philistine women who had been confounded by your infamous ways and had rejected you. Still not satisfied, you prostituted yourself to the Assyrians, but they weren't enough for you either. So you prostituted yourself with the Babylonians, the land of traders, but again you weren't satisfied. How sick was your heart—the LORD God proclaims—that you could do all these things, the deeds of a hardened prostitute. But you weren't like an ordinary prostitute! When you built your pavilion at the head of every street and made your platform in every square, you refused to be paid. You are like an adulterous wife: you take in strangers instead of your husband. Ordinary prostitutes are given gifts, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers. From every direction you even bribed them to come to you for your sexual favors. As a prostitute, you were more perverse than other women. No one approached you for sexual favors, but you yourself gave gifts instead of receiving them. You are perversion itself! Therefore, you prostitute, hear the LORD's word!

The LORD God proclaims: You were in a constant state of arousal and exposed yourself when you acted like a prostitute with your lovers and with the idols to which you gave your children's blood. Therefore, I will now gather all of your lovers whom you pleased, the ones you loved and the ones you rejected. I will gather them against you from all around, and I will expose you to them. They will see it all. I will convict you of adultery and murder, and I will hand you over in bloody fury and zeal. I will hand you over to them, and they will tear down your pavilion and destroy your platforms. They will strip you of your garments, take your beautiful jewels, and they will leave you completely naked. They will bring an army against you, pelt you with stones, and slaughter you with their swords. They will burn down your houses and execute judgments against you in the sight of many women. I will bring an end to your prostitution; indeed, you will never again give payment. When I've satisfied my anger, and my rage has turned away from you, I will be calm and no longer angry. Because you didn't remember your youthful days, and infuriated me with all these things, I will hold you accountable for what you've done. This is what the LORD God says.

Have you not added bad reputation to all your detestable acts? Now everyone who speaks in proverbs will say this about you: "Like mother, like daughter." You are your mother's daughter! She loathed her husband and also her children. You are just like your sisters too! They also loathed their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite, and your father was an Amorite. Your older sister is Samaria, who lives with her daughters in the north. Your younger sister is Sodom, who lives with her daughters in the south. You didn't follow in their ways or engage in their detestable practices in any small way. You were far more destructive. As surely as I live, says the LORD God, not even your sister Sodom and her daughters did what you and your daughters have done! This is the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were proud, had plenty to eat, and enjoyed peace and prosperity; but she didn't help the poor and the needy. They became haughty and did detestable things in front of me, and I turned away from them as soon as I saw it.

Samaria didn't sin even half as much as you did. You've so outstripped her in multiplying your detestable practices, with all the detestable things you've done, that you've even made your sisters seem innocent. Bear your disgrace, which has actually improved your sisters' position. Because your sins and detestable acts were greater than theirs, they are now more righteous than you. Be ashamed, and bear the disgrace of making your sisters righteous! I will improve the circumstances of Sodom and her daughters and the circumstances of Samaria and her daughters. And what's left of your fortune will go to them, so that you will bear your disgrace and be humiliated by all that you've done to make them feel better. Then your sister Sodom and her daughters will return to their former state, and your sister Samaria and her daughters will return to their former state. You and your daughters will return to your former state, but you will no longer talk about your sister Sodom as in your haughty days before your wickedness was exposed. You are now the reproach of all the daughters of Edom and all those around her, including the daughters of the Philistines. They mock you on every side. You alone must bear your bad reputation and your detestable ways. This is what the LORD says.

The LORD God proclaims: I will do to you just as you have done, despising solemn pledges and breaking covenants. Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with you when you were young, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. And you will remember your ways and be ashamed, when in spite of your

covenant I take your big sisters and little sisters from you and give them back to you as daughters. I myself will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. Then you will remember and be ashamed, and you won't even open your mouth because of your shame, after I've forgiven you for all that you've done. This is what the LORD God says.

Transplanted cedar

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, compose a riddle and a parable about the house of Israel. Say, The LORD God proclaims: The great eagle with great wings, long feathers, and full, colorful plumage came to Lebanon and took the top branch of the cedar. He plucked a twig from the cedar's crown, brought it to the land of traders, and set it down in a city of merchants. He took a native seed and planted it in a prepared field, placing it like a willow beside plentiful water. It grew and became a low-spreading vine. Its foliage turned toward him, and its roots developed under him. And so it became a vine, and it produced branches and sent out its shoots.

Now there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage. This vine bent its roots and turned its branches toward him so that it might draw more water from him than from its own bed, a good field with plentiful water where it was planted to grow branches, bear fruit, and become a splendid vine. Say, The LORD God proclaims: Will it thrive? Won't he tear out its roots, strip its fruit, and cause all the leaves of its branches to wither? It will dry up, and no one will need a strong arm or a mighty army to uproot it. Though it is planted, will it thrive? When the east wind touches it, won't it completely wither? On the bed in which it was planted, it will wither away.

The LORD's word came to me: Say now to the rebellious household: Don't you know what these things mean? Say: The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and carried its king and its officers away with him to Babylon. Then he took a prince from the royal line, made an agreement with him, and made him take a solemn pledge of loyalty. He also took away the land's officials. Thus it would be a lowly kingdom, not asserting its own interests but observing the agreement so that it would survive. But the prince rebelled against him and sent messengers to Egypt to supply him with horses and a great army. Can such a person succeed? Can one who does these things escape? Can he overturn the agreement and escape capture? As surely as I live, says the LORD God, he will die in Babylon, in the place of the king who gave him the authority to rule, whose solemn pledge he scorned and whose agreement he overturned. Pharaoh won't help him. There will be no strong force or mighty army in battle when siege ramps are set up and towers are built to eliminate many lives. He scorned the solemn pledge and overturned the agreement! Even though he made a promise, he did all these things, and he won't escape capture. So now the LORD God proclaims: As surely as I live, it was my solemn pledge that he scorned and my agreement that he overturned, and I will hold him accountable. I will spread my net over him, and he will be caught in my trap. I will bring him to Babylon, and I myself will enter into judgment with him there for rebelling against me. All his elite fighters along with all his troops will fall by the sword, and those who are left will be scattered to the winds. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken.

The LORD God proclaims: I myself will take one of the top branches from the tall cedar. I will pluck a tender shoot from its crown, and I myself will plant it on a very high and lofty mountain. On Israel's mountainous highlands I will plant it, and it will send out branches and bear fruit. It will grow into a mighty cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it and find shelter in the shade of its boughs. Then all the trees in the countryside will know that I, the LORD, bring down the tall tree and raise up the lowly tree, and make the green tree wither and the dry tree bloom. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it.

Sins of parents and children

The LORD's word came to me: What do you mean by this proverb of yours about the land of Israel: "When parents eat unripe grapes, the children's teeth suffer"? As surely as I live, says the LORD God, no longer will you use this proverb in Israel! All lives are mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child belong to me. Only the one who sins will die.

People are declared innocent when they act justly and responsibly. They don't eat on the hills or give their attention to the idols of the house of Israel. They don't defile the wives of their neighbors or approach menstruating women. They don't cheat anyone, but fulfill their obligations. They don't rob others, but give food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. They don't impose interest or take profit. They refrain from evil and settle cases between people fairly. They follow my regulations, keep my case laws, and act faithfully. Such people are innocent, and they will live, proclaims the LORD God.

But suppose one of them has a violent child who sheds blood or does any one of these things, even though his parents didn't do any of them. He eats on the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, robs others and doesn't fulfill his obligations, pays attention to the idols and does detestable things, and takes interest and profit. Should he live? He should not. He engaged in all these detestable practices. He will surely die, and his blood will be on him.

But suppose he has a child who sees all the sins that his father committed. He becomes alarmed and doesn't do them. He doesn't eat on the mountains or pay attention to the idols of the house of Israel. He doesn't defile his neighbor's wife. He doesn't cheat anyone, either by seizing collateral for loans or committing robbery. He gives his food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. He refrains from oppressing the poor by taking neither interest nor profit. He observes my case laws and follows my regulations. He won't die because of his father's guilt. He will surely live. As for his father: If he exploited the weak or committed robbery, or did anything else that wasn't good for the people, he will die because of his own guilt.

You will say, "Why doesn't the child bear his parent's guilt?" The child has acted justly and responsibly. The child kept all my regulations and observed them. The child will surely live. Only the one who sins will die. A child won't bear a parent's guilt, and a parent won't bear a child's guilt. Those who do right will be declared innocent, and the wicked will be declared guilty.

But if the wicked turn away from all the sins that they have committed, keep all my regulations, and act justly and responsibly, they will surely live and not die. None of the sins that they committed will be held against them, but they will live because they do the right things. Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the LORD God. Certainly not! If they change their ways, they will live.

If those who do the right thing turn from righteousness and engage in the same detestable practices that the wicked committed, can they do these things and live? None of their righteous deeds will be remembered. They will die because of their treacheries and sins. But you say, "My Lord's way doesn't measure up." Listen, house of Israel, is it my ways that don't measure up? Isn't it your ways that don't measure up? When those who do the right thing turn from their responsible ways and act maliciously, they will die because of it. For their malicious acts they will die. And when the wicked turn from their wicked deeds and act justly and responsibly, they will preserve their lives. When they become alarmed and turn away from all their sins, they will surely live; they won't die. Yet the house of Israel says, "My Lord's way doesn't measure up." Is it my ways that don't measure up? Isn't it your ways that don't measure up, house of Israel? Therefore, I will judge each of you according to your ways, house of Israel. This is what the LORD God says. Turn, turn away from all your sins. Don't let them be sinful obstacles for you. Abandon all of your repeated sins. Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel? I most certainly don't want anyone to die! This is what the LORD God says. Change your ways, and live!

A mother's sons

You, raise a lament for Israel's princes. Say: What a lioness among lionesses was your mother! She bedded down among the strong young lions and reared her cubs. She singled out one of her cubs and he became a strong young lion; he learned to tear flesh and devour humans. When the nations heard about him, they caught him in their trap and carried him with hooks to the land of Egypt. When she realized that she waited in vain, her hope faded. So she took another of her cubs and set him up as a strong young lion. He went on the prowl with the other lions and became a strong young lion. He learned to tear flesh and devour humans; he ravaged their widows and laid waste to their cities. When the earth and everything in it became horrified by the sound of his raging, the nations from the surrounding regions allied against him. They cast their nets over him and caught him in their trap. They put a collar on him and brought him with hooks. They brought him with nets to the king of Babylon so that his voice would no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.

The proud mother

Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted beside the waters; she bore lush fruit and foliage because of the plentiful water, and she produced mighty branches, fit for rulers' scepters. She grew tall, and her crown went up between the clouds. Because of her height and thick growth, she became conspicuous. So she was struck down in anger, thrown down to the ground. The east wind dried her out and destroyed her fruit; it sapped the branch of its strength, and fire consumed it. So now she is planted in the desert, in a parched and thirsty land, and fire has gone out from her branch and consumed her foliage and fruit, leaving her no strong branch or ruler's scepter.

This is a lamentation, and it will serve as a lamentation.

History of rebellion

In the seventh year, on the tenth day of the fifth month, some of Israel's elders came to inquire of the LORD. As they were sitting with me, the LORD's word came to me: Human one, speak to Israel's elders and say to them, The LORD God proclaims: Have you come to petition me? As surely as I live, I reject your petitions. This is what the LORD God says! Will you judge them, human one, will you judge them? Then expose to them the detestable practices of their ancestors. Say to them, The LORD God proclaims: On the day I chose Israel, I swore a solemn pledge to the descendants of Jacob's household. When I made myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I swore a solemn pledge: I am the LORD your God. On that day I swore that I would lead them out of the land of Egypt to a land that I would show them, a land full of milk and honey, the most splendid of all lands. And I said to them, Every one of you must cast away your disgusting things. Don't let yourselves be defiled by Egypt's idols. I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me and refused to listen to me. No one cast off their disgusting things or abandoned their Egyptian idols. So I declared that I would pour out my wrath on them and satisfy my anger against them in the land of Egypt. But I acted for my name's sake, so that it wouldn't be degraded in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, and in whose sight I made it known that I would lead them out of the land of Egypt.

So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my regulations and made known to them my case laws, which bring life to all who observe them. I also gave them my sabbaths as a sign between us that I, the LORD, have set them apart for my purpose. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the desert. They didn't follow my regulations and rejected my case laws, which bring life to all who observe them. They completely degraded my sabbaths. So I declared that I would pour out my anger against them and destroy them in the desert. But instead, I acted for the sake of my name so that it wouldn't be degraded in the sight of the nations who saw me lead them out of Egypt. So in the desert I swore another solemn pledge, that I wouldn't bring them to the land that I had given to them, a land full of milk and honey, a land more splendid than any other, because they rejected my case laws, didn't follow my regulations, and degraded my sabbaths. They had their hearts set on their idols. But I had too much compassion to destroy them, so I didn't put an end to them in the desert.

In the desert, I said to their children, Don't follow your parents' regulations or observe their case laws or become defiled by their idols. I am the LORD your God! Follow my regulations! Observe my case laws and do them! Make my sabbaths holy, and let them be a sign between us that I am the LORD your God. But the children rebelled against me. They didn't follow my regulations or observe my case laws, which bring life to all who observe them. They also degraded my sabbaths. So I declared that I would pour out my wrath on them and satisfy my anger against them in the desert. But I restrained myself and acted for the sake of my name so that it wouldn't be diminished in the sight of the nations who saw me lead them out of Egypt. And I swore yet another solemn pledge in the desert, that I would disperse them among the nations and scatter them throughout the earth, because they didn't observe my case laws, they rejected my regulations, and they degraded my sabbaths while they kept looking to their parents' idols. I also issued regulations that were not good and case laws by which they could not live. I defiled them with their very gifts when they offered up all their oldest children. They were supposed to be so horrified that they would acknowledge that I am the LORD.

Therefore, human one, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, The LORD God proclaims: Yet again your ancestors defamed me by rebelling against me! ²⁸I brought them into the land that I swore to give to them. But when they saw all the high hills and lofty trees, there they made their sacrifices: irksome offerings here,

pleasing aromas there, and drink offerings elsewhere! I said to them, What shrine are you going to now? So it's called Shrine to this very day.

So now say to the house of Israel, The LORD God proclaims: Will you defile yourselves as your ancestors did, and will you prostitute yourself after their disgusting things? When you offer up your gifts and make your children pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this very day. Should I let you seek me out, house of Israel? This is what the LORD God says: As surely as I live, I won't let you seek me. What is in your minds will never happen! You've been saying, "Let's be like the nations and the clans of the lands in the service of wood and stone." This is what the LORD God says: As surely as I live, with a strong hand, an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be your king! I will lead you out from the peoples and gather you from the countries where you've been scattered—yes, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out! I will march you out to the wilderness nations, and there I will judge you face-to-face. Just as I judged your ancestors in the desert of the land of Egypt, so will I judge you. This is what the LORD God says. I will make you walk under the rod, and I will bring you into the covenant bond. I will remove from among you those who rebel and transgress against me. I will lead them out from the land where they lived as immigrants, but they won't enter Israel's fertile land. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

But to you, house of Israel, the LORD God proclaims: Go ahead and serve your idols, all of you! But afterward, if any of you are left to listen to me, you will no longer make my holy name impure with your gifts or your idols! On my holy mountain, on the high mountain in Israel, the whole house of Israel will serve me there—every one of them in the land! This is what the LORD God says. There I will accept them, and there I will ask for their offerings, their finest gifts, and all their holy things. When I bring you out from the nations and gather you from the countries where you are scattered, I will accept you as a pleasing aroma. Through you I will be made holy in the sight of the nations. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you to Israel's fertile land, to the land that I swore to give to your ancestors. There you will remember how your ways and all your wicked deeds defiled you, and you will loathe yourselves for all the wicked things that you've done. Then, house of Israel, you will know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for the sake of my name and not according to your wicked ways and ruinous deeds. This is what the LORD God says.

Fire in the southern plain

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, face Teman, preach against the south, and prophesy against the thicket in the arid southern plain. Say to the thicket in the arid southern plain: Hear the LORD God's word. This is what the LORD God says: I'm about to set a fire in you, and it will consume every green and every dry tree in you. Its blazing flame won't be put out, and everything from south to north will be scorched. Everyone will see that I, the LORD, have set it on fire. It won't be quenched. Then I said, "Oh, LORD God! They say about me, 'Isn't he one for making metaphors?'"

The sword

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, face Jerusalem, preach against their sanctuary, and prophesy against Israel's fertile land. Say to Israel's fertile land, The LORD proclaims: I'm now against you! I will draw my sword from its sheath and cut off both the righteous and the wicked from you. In order to cut off the righteous and wicked from you, my sword will go out from its sheath against everyone from south to north. And everyone will know that I, the LORD, have taken my sword out of its sheath. It won't be put away again.

You, human one, groan in their sight; groan bitterly with trembling knees. If they ask you why you're groaning, say to them, "Because of the news." When it comes, every heart will despair, every hand will hang lifeless, every spirit will be listless, and urine will run down every leg. It's coming! It will happen! This is what the LORD God says.

The sword dance

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, prophesy! Say, The Lord proclaims! Say:

A sword! A sharp and polished sword!
For utter slaughter it is sharpened, polished to flash like lightning.
Let's not rejoice, because no one will escape the purge.
He appoints it for polishing, to seize in the hand.
The sword is sharpened, it is polished; it is ready for the destroyer's hand.
Human one, cry aloud, and wail, for it comes against my people,
against all of Israel's princes, handed over to the sword along with my people.
Therefore, strike your thigh. He's testing.
When even the rod rejects, will it not certainly happen?
This is what the LORD God says.

And you, human one, prophesy! Strike hand to hand.
Let the sword strike twice, three times!
It's a deadly sword, a great deadly sword.
It whirls around them to make hearts shudder, to make many stumble and fall.
I've set the slaughtering sword against all their gates.
Oh! It's crafted to flash like lightning, polished for slaughter!
Stab again and again! Plunge right, plunge left, wherever your edge goes.
It is I who strike hand to hand! I'll satisfy my wrath! I, the LORD, have spoken.

Guilt remembered

The LORD's word came to me: You, human one, mark two roads for the coming of the sword of the king of Babylon. They should diverge from a single country. Where the road to the city begins, set up a sign, and point out the way for the sword to come: "To Rabbah of the Ammonites" or "To Judah in its stronghold Jerusalem." The king of Babylon stands at the fork in the road where the two roads begin and performs his divinations. He shakes the arrows, consults the divine images, and inspects the liver. On his right side appeared the omen for Jerusalem: to put battering rams in place, to proclaim war and raise the alarm, to place battering rams against the gates, and to set up siege ramps and build towers. It seems to them like a lying divination, because solemn pledges had been sworn to them. But he will remind them of their guilt, and they will be captured.

So the LORD God proclaims: Now that you have remembered your guilt and your treacheries are exposed, your sins can be seen in everything you do. Because you have brought your guilt to light, you will be captured! But you vile, wicked prince of Israel whose day has come, the time of final punishment, this is what the LORD God says: Remove the turban, take off the crown! Nothing will be as it was. Bring down the exalted, and exalt the lowly. A ruin, ruin, ruin, I'll make it! Such a thing has never happened! Even before the rightful judge comes, I've handed it over to him.

Avenging Ammon's disgrace

You, human one, prophesy and say, The LORD God proclaims to the Ammonites concerning their disgrace. Say, Sword! Sword unsheathed for slaughter, burnished, battle-ready, flashing like lightning: False visions and lying divinations set you against the necks of vile, wicked men whose day had come, the time of final punishment. Return it to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you. I will pour out my wrath against you. With a raging fire I will blow against you, and I will hand you over to those who burn and forge destruction. Fire will consume you, your blood will sink into the earth, and you will no longer be remembered. I, the LORD, have spoken.

Bloody city

The LORD's word came to me: You, human one, will you judge? Will you judge the bloody city? Then explain all her detestable practices to her. Say, The LORD God proclaims: City, self-destructive blood-letter, self-defiling idol maker: All the blood that you've shed is your punishment, and all the idols that you've made are your defilement. This is how you've shortened your days and hastened the end of your years! For this reason I've given you over to the ridicule of nations and the derision of every land. Those from near and far will mock

your infamous name and great chaos. Look, Israel's princes, every one of them, have joined forces to shed blood in you. In you they treat father and mother with contempt. In you they oppress immigrants and deny the rights of orphans and widows. You despise my holy things and degrade my sabbaths. In you slanderers show up to shed blood. In you they eat on the mountains. In you they do obscene things. In you a father's nakedness is uncovered. In you menstruating women are violated. Every man engages in detestable practices with his neighbor's wife, every man defiles his daughter-in-law with obscene acts, and every man violates his sister, his own father's daughter. In you they take bribes to shed blood. You collect interest and fees, you profit by extorting your neighbor, and you neglect even me! This is what the LORD God says.

I now strike my hands over your ill-gotten gain and blood that's been shed in you. Will your strength and courage endure when I deal with you? I am the LORD: I speak, and I act! I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you throughout the lands, and so I will remove your uncleanness from you. When you are degraded like this in the sight of the nations, then you will know that I am the LORD.

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, the house of Israel has become a waste product for me. They are all copper, tin, iron, and lead. In the furnace, they've become the waste product of silver. So this is what the LORD God says: Because you've all become a waste product, I'm now gathering you into the middle of Jerusalem. Just as silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin are collected and placed in a furnace to fan the flames under them and melt them down, so in my anger and rage I will collect you, put you in, and melt you down. I will gather you, fan the flames of my wrath under you, and melt you down in the middle of it. As silver is melted in a furnace, so you will be melted in it. You will know that I, the LORD, have poured out my rage on you.

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, say to her, You are an unclean land without rain on the day of reckoning. The conspiracy of princes in her is like a roaring lion ripping up prey. They've piled up wealth and precious goods and made many widows in her. Her priests have done violence to my instructions and made my holy things impure. They have not clearly separated the holy from the ordinary, and they have not taught the difference between unclean and clean things. They've disregarded my sabbaths. So I've been degraded among them. The officials in her are like wolves ripping up prey. They shed blood and destroy lives for unjust riches. Her prophets have whitewashed everything for them, seeing false visions and making wrong predictions for them, saying, "This is what the LORD God says," when the LORD hasn't spoken. The important people of the land have practiced extortion and have committed robbery. They've oppressed the poor and mistreated the immigrant. They've oppressed and denied justice. I looked for anyone to repair the wall and stand in the gap for me on behalf of the land, so I wouldn't have to destroy it. But I couldn't find anyone. So I've poured out my anger on them. With my furious fire I've finished them off. I've held them accountable. This is what the LORD God proclaims.

Two sisters

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, there were two women, daughters of one woman. When they were girls in Egypt, they began to prostitute themselves by allowing their young and nubile breasts to be touched and fondled. The older sister was named Oholah, and the younger sister was named Oholibah. They became mine and gave birth to sons and daughters. Now Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem. But Oholah became unfaithful to me and lusted after her lovers the Assyrians: warriors dressed in fine blue cloth, governors and officers, charioteers and horsemen, all of them the most handsome of men. She sought them out to seduce them, all of them men of the highest rank of Assyria. She defiled herself by everyone she lusted after and also by all their idols. But she never gave up her promiscuities with the Egyptians, who had slept with her in her girlhood and fondled her nubile breasts, and who continued to seduce her. Therefore, I handed her over to her lovers, to the Assyrians for whom she lusted. They stripped her naked, took her sons and daughters, and killed her with the sword. And she became notorious among women for the punishments they enacted against her.

Her sister Oholibah saw it, and she proceeded to outdo her sister in her lust and in her seductions. She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officers, warriors richly clothed, charioteers and horsemen, all of them the most handsome of men. I saw that she too defiled herself. Both had the same tendencies, but she was even more promiscuous. She saw men carved in wall reliefs, images of Chaldeans outlined in vermilion, wearing

only loincloths around their hips and flowing headbands on their heads. All of them had the appearance of warriors of the third rank, the likeness of Babylonians whose native land is Chaldea. Aroused just by looking at them, she sent messengers to them in Chaldea. The Babylonians came to her to lie down and make love with her, defiling her with their seductions. But once she had defiled herself with them, she recoiled from them in disgust. When her seductions became known and her nakedness exposed, I recoiled from her just as I had recoiled from her sister. But she added to her promiscuities, bringing to mind her youthful days when she was a prostitute in the land of Egypt. She lusted after their male consorts, whose sexual organs were like those of donkeys, and whose ejaculation was like that of horses. She relived the wicked days of her youth, when the Egyptians touched and fondled her young and nubile breasts.

So Oholibah, the LORD God proclaims: I'm now inciting your lovers against you, all those from whom you recoiled, and I will bring them against you from all around— Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, all the Assyrians with them, the most handsome young men, all of them governors and officers, career officers and conscripts, all of them on horseback. They will come against you with weapons, chariots, and wagons, and with a great army, with shield, buckler, and helmet; and they will surround you. I will hand your punishment over to them, and they will judge you according to their laws. I will direct my passion against you, and they will deal with you in wrath. They will cut off your nose and ears, and those who are left will fall by the sword. They will seize your sons and daughters, and those who are left will be burned with fire. They will strip your clothing from you and remove your beautiful crown. That's how I will put an end to your lewdness and your Egyptian-styled promiscuity. Never again will you stare at them, and you won't remember Egypt anymore. The LORD God proclaims: I'm now handing you over to those whom you hate and from whom you recoil. They will deal hatefully with you: They will seize your pay and leave you completely naked. Your promiscuity, betrayal, and seductions will be exposed. This will be done to you because you sold yourself to the nations and became defiled by their idols. You followed in your sister's path, so I have put her cup into your hand.

The LORD God proclaims: Deep and wide is your sister's cup. Drink! Appointed for abuse and scorn, it overflows. You will be filled with drunken sadness. A cup of devastation and dismay is the cup of your sister Samaria. Drink it, drain it dry, break it into pieces, and tear off your breasts, for I have spoken. This is what the LORD God says.

So now the LORD God proclaims: Because you forgot me and turned your back on me, you alone will bear the consequences of your betrayal and promiscuities. Then the LORD said to me, Human one, judge Oholah and Oholibah, and make known their detestable practices to them. They committed adultery, so now blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols, and they even took their children whom they had borne to me and offered them up to be consumed for them. They also did this to me: On the same day, they made my sanctuary unclean and made my sabbaths impure. When they slaughtered their children for their idols, they came into my sanctuary and made it impure on that very same day. They actually did this inside my temple.

The southern kingdom falls

It was precisely because the LORD was angry with Jerusalem and Judah that he thrust them out of his presence.

Now Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonian king. So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's rule, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem with his entire army. He camped beside the city and built a siege wall all around it. ²The city was under attack until King Zedekiah's eleventh year. (2 Kings 24:20-25:2)

In the ninth year and the tenth month of Judah's King Zedekiah, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar and his entire army came against Jerusalem and surrounded it. (Jeremiah 39:1)

It was because the LORD was angry against Jerusalem and Judah that he thrust them out of his presence. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. In the ninth year, the tenth month, and the tenth day of the month, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem with all of his army. He camped beside the city and built a siege wall around it. The city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (Jeremiah 52:3-5)

On the day that Babylon set siege to Jerusalem, the prophet, Ezekiel received word from God...

Ezekiel 24:1-14

In the ninth year, on the tenth day of the tenth month, the LORD's word came to me: Human one, write down today's date, because today the king of Babylon has set up camp at Jerusalem—today! Compose a parable for the rebels' household and say to them, The LORD God proclaims:

Put on the pot, set it on, and fill it with water.
Add meat to it, every good piece.
With shoulder and thigh, the meatiest bones, fill it up.
Take the flock's best animal; arrange the wood beneath it.
Bring it to a rolling boil, and cook its bones in it.

The LORD God proclaims: Horror! You bloody city, you corroded pot; pot whose corrosion can't be removed! Empty it piece by piece. She is rejected because her blood is still with her. She didn't pour it out on the ground so that it could be covered with dirt, but she spread it out on a bare rock. In order to arouse wrath, to guarantee vengeance, I will spread her blood on a bare rock, never to be covered.

So now the LORD God proclaims:

Horror! You bloody city! I myself will add fuel to the fire!
Pile on the wood, light the fire, and cook the meat.
Season it well and let the bones be charred.
Let the pot stand empty on its coals until it's so hot that its copper glows,
its impurities melt in it, and its corrosion is consumed.
It's a worthless task. Even by fire its great corrosion isn't removed.

How your betrayals defile you! I cleansed you, but you didn't come clean from your impurities. You won't be clean again until I have exhausted my anger against you. I, the LORD, have spoken! It's coming, and I'll do it. I won't relent or have any pity or compassion. Your punishments will fit your ways and your deeds! This is what the LORD God says.