

The Mindset of the Jews Concerning Their Captivity in Ezekiel

The people of Judah had a complicated attitude toward their captivity in Babylon. Many did not fully accept that their suffering was the result of their own sins, and some continued to believe that Jerusalem would be spared or that their captivity would soon end.

The central issue in Ezekiel is that the people often misunderstood why God had sent them into captivity, resisted the warnings of His prophets, and struggled to accept personal responsibility for their conduct.

Several passages in Ezekiel reveal their thinking and whom they considered responsible.

1. They believed their captivity would not last long

1. Some of the exiles hoped they would soon return to Jerusalem. False prophets encouraged this expectation.
2. Ezekiel 11:2–3 describes men who were giving wicked counsel and saying:
3. “It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh.”

The meaning of this difficult statement is debated, but these men were expressing confidence about Jerusalem and giving counsel contrary to God’s warnings.

4. More explicitly, God condemned prophets who promised peace when judgment was coming.
5. Ezekiel 13:10 – “Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace...”
6. Their mindset: Things are not as bad as Ezekiel says. We will be all right.
7. The danger was that false reassurance prevented the people from recognizing the seriousness of their sins.

2. They blamed their ancestors for their troubles

1. One of the clearest expressions of their thinking appears in Ezekiel 18.
2. Ezekiel 18:2 (AKJV):
3. “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”
4. This proverb expressed the idea that children were suffering because of what their fathers had done. The people apparently used their ancestors’ sins to explain their present suffering.

5. God directly challenged this way of thinking.
6. Ezekiel 18:20 (AKJV):
7. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son...”
8. God was not denying that the sins of one generation can affect another. Rather, He was teaching that each person was accountable to Him for his or her own conduct.
9. Their mindset: We are suffering because of what our fathers did.
10. God’s answer: Each person is accountable for his own sins. The present generation could not use the sins of its ancestors as an excuse for refusing to repent.

3. They blamed God and considered His ways unfair

1. Perhaps the most revealing passage is Ezekiel 18:25 – “Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?”
2. The people accused God of acting unfairly. Instead of recognizing the justice of His judgment, they questioned His ways.
3. God responded by explaining that He judges people according to their conduct. A wicked person who repents and turns from his sins can live; a righteous person who turns to wickedness cannot presume upon his former righteousness (Ezekiel 18:21–24).
4. This reveals an important spiritual problem: they were more inclined to question God’s justice than to examine their own behavior.
5. Their attitude was essentially, God is treating us unfairly.
6. God’s response was that His ways were just and that their own ways were unequal.

4. Those remaining in Jerusalem looked down on the exiles

1. The people who remained in Jerusalem also had a distorted view of those already carried into captivity.
2. Ezekiel 11:15 – “Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the LORD: unto us is this land given in possession.”
3. The inhabitants of Jerusalem apparently regarded the exiles as people who had been removed from God’s favor and believed that the land now belonged to those who remained.
4. But God turned this thinking upside down. He promised to be a sanctuary to the exiles in the lands where they had gone (Ezekiel 11:16).
5. The people in Jerusalem mistakenly assumed that their physical presence in the

land guaranteed their spiritual standing with God.

6. Their mindset: We are still in Jerusalem, so we are the ones who have God's favor.
7. Yet the presence of the temple and possession of the land did not protect them from judgment when they persisted in idolatry and rebellion.

5. Some acknowledged their sins but felt there was no hope

1. By Ezekiel 33, the people were expressing a different kind of despair.
2. Ezekiel 33:10 — "Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?"
3. Here they acknowledged their transgressions and sins, but they seemed overwhelmed by their condition. They questioned how they could possibly live.
4. God's answer was not that they should surrender to despair. He called them to repentance.
5. Ezekiel 33:11 — "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live..."
6. God wanted them to turn from their wickedness and live.
7. Their problem was no longer simply denial. It was also the temptation to believe that their sinful condition left them without hope.

6. So, whom did they blame?

The book of Ezekiel reveals several different attitudes rather than one uniform opinion.

Their attitude	Biblical reference	God's answer
Their ancestors were responsible for their suffering.	Ezekiel 18:2	Each person is accountable for his own conduct.
God was treating them unfairly.	Ezekiel 18:25–29	God's ways are just; their ways were not.
The exiles had lost God's favor, while those in Jerusalem retained it.	Ezekiel 11:15–16	God remained a sanctuary to the exiles.
Jerusalem would be safe or judgment would not come as warned.	Ezekiel 13:10	False assurances would not prevent judgment.
Their sins had left them with no hope of living.	Ezekiel 33:10–11	God called them to repent and live.

7. The deeper lesson: Who was really responsible?

Ezekiel repeatedly brought the people back to the same fundamental truth: Judah's cap-

tivity was a consequence of the people's rebellion against God, and they needed to repent rather than excuse themselves.

God had not acted arbitrarily. The people had turned to idols, violated His commandments, oppressed others, and rejected His warnings. The corruption described in Ezekiel 8 helps explain why judgment came.

At the same time, God did not abandon the possibility of restoration. Ezekiel 18:23 asks:

“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?”

God's purpose was not simply to punish. He called His people to recognize their sins, turn back to Him, and live.

A useful theme for a Bible class on Ezekiel is this: When people suffer the consequences of sin, they may blame their ancestors, question God's justice, trust false assurances, or despair of hope. God's message through Ezekiel was to accept responsibility, recognize His justice, and repent while there was still an opportunity to turn to Him.

Who was Tammuz?

In Ezekiel 8:14, Tammuz was a pagan deity associated with vegetation, fertility, and the seasonal cycle of life and death. The women of Jerusalem were weeping for him as part of a pagan religious ritual, which God showed Ezekiel in a vision of the abominations being committed in the temple.

1. What does Ezekiel 8:14 say?

“Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.” — Ezekiel 8:14 (AKJV)

2. Who was Tammuz?

Tammuz was the name used in the Bible for a deity known in Mesopotamian religion as Dumuzi.

1. A fertility deity: He was associated with the fertility of the land, flocks, and vegetation.
2. A figure associated with death and mourning: Mesopotamian traditions connected Dumuzi with a recurring cycle of disappearance and return, associated with the seasonal decline of vegetation.

3. A focus of ritual lamentation: The women in Ezekiel 8 were participating in mourning rites connected with this pagan deity. The precise details of the ritual practiced in Jerusalem are not fully known.

3. Why were the women weeping for Tammuz?

The passage does not explain the exact words or actions of the ritual. However, the mourning was probably connected with traditions about Tammuz's death or disappearance.

The important point in Ezekiel's account is not merely the identity of this deity, but the fact that women were practicing pagan worship within the setting of the LORD'S temple.

Notice the progression in Ezekiel 8:

Verse	Abomination shown to Ezekiel
Ezekiel 8:5–6	An idol that provoked God to jealousy
Ezekiel 8:7–13	Elders secretly worshipping images of creeping things and beasts
Ezekiel 8:14–15	Women weeping for Tammuz
Ezekiel 8:16	Men worshipping the sun toward the east

God was showing Ezekiel the extent of Israel's spiritual corruption, even within the temple precincts.

4. Why was this so serious to God?

1. The worship of Tammuz violated Israel's exclusive obligation to worship Jehovah. God had commanded:
2. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." — Exodus 20:3 (AKJV)
3. The people were not simply neglecting God; they were bringing pagan religious practices into a place dedicated to His worship.
4. God's response to these practices is stated in Ezekiel 8:18:
5. "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity..." — Ezekiel 8:18 (AKJV)
6. This vision helps explain the seriousness of the judgment that Ezekiel would announce against Jerusalem.

A key lesson from Ezekiel 8: Religious activity does not please God simply because it takes place in a religious setting. Worship must be consistent with God's revealed will, rather than borrowed from practices that He has condemned.