

Ezekiel 12:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?

Analysis

God addresses a skeptical proverb: 'Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?' The people had developed a cynical saying dismissing prophetic warnings—'days drag on, visions fail.' This reflects skepticism born from delayed judgment. Prophets warned for decades, yet Jerusalem still stood, creating false security and mockery of prophecy.

The Hebrew *mashal* (משל, 'proverb') indicates a popular saying, wisdom literature, or mocking taunt. Here it's clearly dismissive—people mocking prophetic warnings because immediate fulfillment hadn't occurred. This dangerous assumption that delay equals failure misunderstands divine patience and timing. God's delays serve merciful purposes, but persistent impenitence turns patience into stored wrath (Romans 2:4-5).

From a Reformed perspective, this verse warns against presuming on God's patience. Peter addresses similar scoffers who mock Christ's delayed return: 'Where is the promise of His coming?' (2 Peter 3:3-4). The answer: God's patience allows time for repentance, but judgment will certainly come (2 Peter 3:8-10). Delayed judgment isn't canceled judgment; it's extended opportunity that heightens accountability for those who persist in sin.

Historical Context

Prophetic warnings began seriously with Isaiah (740-681 BC) and continued through Jeremiah (627-586 BC), Ezekiel (593-571 BC), and minor prophets. Over 150 years of warning preceded final judgment. During this time, Jerusalem survived Assyrian siege (701 BC), encouraging false belief in inviolability. The proverb reflects dangerous complacency bred by Yahweh's patience.

Historical parallels exist—Rome mocked early Christians' expectation of Christ's imminent return when decades passed. Modern skeptics mock biblical warnings about final judgment because two millennia have elapsed. Yet God's timescale differs from human impatience (2 Peter 3:8). Delay doesn't equal failure; it reflects patience. But when judgment comes, it comes suddenly and completely (Matthew 24:37-39, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the people's mocking proverb warn against confusing God's patience with His impotence?
2. What does delayed judgment teach about God's character and purposes rather than about prophecy's failure?
3. In what ways do modern skeptics make similar assumptions about unfulfilled prophecy regarding Christ's return?

Interlinear Text

בֶּן	אָדָם	מָה	הַמָּשָׁל	הַזֶּה	לָכֵן	עַל
Son	of man		what is that proverb			
H1121	H120	H4100	H4912	H2088	H0	H5921
<hr/>						
אֲדֹמָת	אֶרֶץ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֵאמֹר	יִאָּרְכוּ	הַיָּמִים	וְאֵבֶדְ
that ye have in the land		of Israel	saying	are prolonged	The days	faileth
H127		H3478	H559	H748	H3117	H6
<hr/>						
כָּל	דִּזְיוֹן:					
	and every vision					
H3605	H2377					

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 11:3 (Parallel theme): Which say, It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh.

Ezekiel 12:27 (References Israel): Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.

Isaiah 5:19 (References Israel): That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

Amos 6:3 (Parallel theme): Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;