

Ezekiel – Getting Attention

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Conditions of Ezekiel's Service: Ezekiel was required to more or less **withdraw from the daily life of the exile community** – his only contact with the community was to communicate YHWH's messages. This semi-isolation was to continue until the fall of Jerusalem (about 9 years). The **constraints were obviously not "full time"** – Ezekiel had a wife, most likely he was able to speak with her in private and have a normal private life; the "binding" meant that he was **NOT to freely mingle with the people**; but **only deliver YHWH's word**. (Ez3:22-27)

The Role of the Watchman: Ezekiel is told, **"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel"**. This responsibility is serious – presumably this became a basis of his teaching (Ez3:16-21). The concept of **individual responsibility** is specified in the second commandment – repentance allows individuals to break out of the cycle of generational sin (Ex20:4-6, Dt5:8-10). Individual responsibility is the foundation of "repentance" – **each person stands alone before God**. In the ancient world, children were frequently killed arbitrarily (see Herodotus 1:18, 7:114, Josephus Antiquities 13:14:2). The role of the watchman is to warn as required by God – **if the warning is NOT presented, God holds the watchman responsible** – the Church is assigned the "role of watchman" today (Mt4:4-6).

The Impending Destruction of Jerusalem: Ezekiel was required to perform in public four symbolic actions which graphically demonstrated the fate of Jerusalem and the people there – first, **a symbolic representation of the upcoming siege** (Ez4:1-3). The exiles had experienced this in 597BC (2Kg24:10-16). The significance of the **"iron griddle"** is not stated – perhaps it was symbolic that YHWH would no longer extend mercy to Jerusalem: the destruction is inevitable.

The Iniquity of Israel: For the **second symbolic action**, Ezekiel is to lie on his side to **"bear the iniquity of the house of Israel"** (Ez4:4-8). The **numbers "390" and "40" are enigmatic** – there is no explicit indication of their meaning: "40" became a general metaphor for sin based on the "40" days the spies were in Canaan; "390" has no obvious association – possibly it relates to the duration of the existence of the first Temple (1Kg6:37-38). The word translated "iniquity" is עֲוֹן - **awon it can be translated "punishment" or "iniquity"** – "punishment" implies that Ezekiel is "atoning" for the iniquity, which is the role of sacrifice – looking to the Messiah; so, "iniquity" is preferable. **The role of the priest is to "bear the iniquity"** (Ex28:38, Nm18:1) until it is expiated through sacrifice.

Prepare for Exile: The **third symbolic action**, **"food supply"** (Ez4:9-17, Lv26:26, 33, 38-39, Dt28:17, 48, 52, 65). The action and the message are for the exiles. The prophecy is of impending conditions in Jerusalem. The exiles were much better off than the people remaining in Jerusalem.

The Remnant: The **fourth symbolic action**, **"cutting the hair"** (Ez5:1-4). **Shaving the beard was an act of great humiliation** (2Sm10:4-5). After the 390 days, Ezekiel was to light a fire over his brick. The hair represented the people in Jerusalem: 1/3 die in the city, 1/3 die around the city; 1/3 are scattered in exile. Of those already in exile, i.e., those with Ezekiel, **a small number would form the remnant**, and even some of them are burned in the fire. Those that remain will **prepare for the Messiah, "a fire to Israel"** (Mt10:34, Lk12:49). The final "fire to Israel" was the destructions in 70AD and 135AD, but more **generally "the fire" of the gospel**.

YHWH's Case Against Israel: This is no doubt representative of **Ezekiel's preaching during the 390 days** (Ez5:5-9). In spite of YHWH's remaining faithful to the Sinai Covenant, Israel repeatedly rebelled against the terms of the covenant. מִשְׁפָּט - **mish'pat**, mean "justness" as a character attribute of God, **"mish'patim"** plural, is the **understanding / wisdom that comes from living by the torah**. There are many nuances of meaning – it is a very complicated word. There is no corresponding English word – "judgements" and "rules" are not even close. The word "turbulent" is from הֶמוּן - hamon, it means "agitation", "bustle turmoil", "din", "uproar"; **"turbulent" is a good translation – Israel was constantly in a state of political polarization, much as Western Civilization is today**.

Reiteration of Covenant Curses: Using the language of the covenant curses, **Ezekiel explains the significance of his symbolic actions** (Ez5:10-17, Lv26:14-39, Dt28:15-68). **"Defiled my sanctuary"** is an allusion to the "390" years of the Temple. **"I will have no pity"** is an allusion to the iron griddle. The **"third part"** is an allusion to symbolic action of "cutting the hair". The covenant "blessings and curses" are directly applied by YHWH, but there is also an "automatic aspect" to them (Lv26:3, 11-12, Dt28:2, 15). **Western Civilization is feeling the full brunt of these curses today** – the "blessings" are gone.