

Notes:

1. In these chapters, Ezekiel acts out wordless prophetic messages instead of speaking them. His figures include a model of Jerusalem, eating bread made of mixed grains, and shaving his head and beard. This method is not unique to Ezekiel. Other examples are Saul cutting up two oxen to rally the Israelite army or Agabus in Acts 21 portraying Paul's coming imprisonment by tying his own hands. Ezekiel will use other visual parables: wood from vines in chapter 15, Israel as a helpless baby in chapter 16, eagles and trees in chapter 17, promiscuous sisters in chapter 23, dry bones restored to life in chapter 37, and so forth.

2. In verse 3:27 the Lord declares, "He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house." This recognizes that some hearts are hardened against the Lord and further appeals are useless. Revelation 21:11 is similar: "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

3. Ezekiel lies bound on left side for 390 days to symbolize 390 years of judgment against Israel. Then he lies on his right side for 40 days to show 40 years of judgment against Judah. (In actuality, he likely only did this a few hours per day.) The meaning of these numbers is unclear. One suggestion is that the 390 years begins with the prophecy to Jeroboam that the 10 tribes of Israel will be torn from Judah, and the 40 years is the length of Solomon's reign which begins the descent into idolatry. Or some say that the total, 430, equals the time from Jehoiachin's downfall to the temporary restoration of Israel's sovereignty under the Maccabees.

4. Verse 5:10 describes the appalling famine that will grip Jerusalem during its final siege. 2 Kings 25:3 confirms the fulfillment of the prophecy. But all was foretold centuries earlier, in Deuteronomy 28:49-57 where the Lord clearly spells out the curses He will bring upon His people if they rebel against Him.

5. The modern Israeli city of Tel Aviv is named after the Tel-Abib of 3:15 (but not in the same location), which could mean renewed by a spring of water or swept away by a flood.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. Why would the house of Israel not listen to Ezekiel?
2. What are the duties of a "watchman"? What does verse 3:20 where the Lord says "his blood I will require at your hand"?
3. Why, do you think, does the Lord make Ezekiel mute after telling him to speak to the people?

4. What is the meaning of Ezekiel's first "pantomime" in 4:1-8?
5. What is the message of the object lesson with the mixed grains?
6. What is foretold by the parable of 5:1-4?
7. What is the charge against Israel in chapter 5?
8. Is the Lord holding out opportunity for repentance or is His mind made up?