

Signs

And the Sign to Which They Point

Ezekiel 3:16 And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me:
17 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

18 If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

19 But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

20 Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand.

21 But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.”

22 And the hand of the Lord was upon me there. And he said to me, “Arise, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you.”

23 So I arose and went out into the valley, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the Chebar canal, and I fell on my face.

24 But the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me and said to me, “Go, shut yourself within your house.

25 And you, O son of man, behold, cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people.

²⁶ And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house.

²⁷ But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.

4 "And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem.

² And put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.

³ And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.

⁴ "Then lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it. For the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment.

⁵ For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel.

⁶ And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year.

⁷ And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared, and you shall prophesy against the city.

⁸ And behold, I will place cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.

⁹ "And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer, and put them into a single vessel and make your bread from them. During the number of days that you lie on your side, 390 days, you shall eat it.

¹⁰ And your food that you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from day to day you shall eat it.

¹¹ And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hin; from day to day you shall drink.

¹² And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.”

¹³ And the Lord said, “Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them.”

¹⁴ Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth.”

¹⁵ Then he said to me, “See, I assign to you cow’s dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread.”

¹⁶ Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay.

¹⁷ I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment.

⁵ “And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword. Use it as a barber’s razor and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair.

² A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them.

³ And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe.

⁴ And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.

⁵ “Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.

⁶ And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes.

⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you,

⁸ therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.

⁹ And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again.

¹⁰ Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds.

¹¹ Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.

¹² A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them.

¹³ “Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them.

¹⁴ Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by.

¹⁵ You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the Lord; I have spoken—

¹⁶ when I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread.

¹⁷ I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord; I have spoken.”

(Ezekiel 2:1-3:15)

Signs

Picture a quiet farm in Pennsylvania. A man named **Graham Hess** wakes up to find strange crop circles carved into his cornfield. At first, he thinks it's a prank—kids messing around. But then his dogs go wild, attacking his children. A baby monitor picks up eerie clicks and whispers. A news report shows an alien at a child's birthday party, green and scaly, slipping through an alley. His little girl, Bo, leaves half-drunk glasses of water everywhere, saying it tastes funny. His son, Morgan, struggles with asthma. His brother, Merrill, keeps a baseball bat on the wall, a reminder of his failed career that could have been something. Graham, a **former pastor**, sees these as random annoyances. They are proof the world is cruel and God is absent. He's lost his faith after becoming bitter and angry at God after his wife's tragic death in a car accident where she remained alive for a short while, impaled, conscious, but about to die. Her dying words were a jumbled, garbled, incoherent babble: "**See,**" and "**Swing away, Merrill.**" By the end of the movie *Signs*, these 'signs'—the circles, the water, the asthma, the bat, the last words of a dying wife—come together to save his family

from aliens. What seemed like chaos was God's predestined plan that eventually restored Graham's faith in God.

Now, imagine **Ezekiel**, a priest in ancient Israel, called by God to do **some very bizarre things**. He must lie on his side for 390 days, then 40 more, tied up, barely eating. He must build a model of Jerusalem under siege, like a child's war game, but deadly serious. He is to cook bread over human feces to show the filth of exile. He must shave his head and burn his hair, scattering it to the wind. To Israel, these acts looked crazy, pointless, even disgusting. But they were **God's signs of predestined judgment** while implicitly pleading for repentance. Like the crop circles in Graham's field, Ezekiel's acts were strange, shocking, and deliberate. They were God's way of saying, 'Wake up! I'm still here. For better or for worse.' Today we will see how God uses wild signs of his prophet to grab our attention, break our stubbornness, and point us to hope.

Ezekiel 3:16-5:17 in Context

Ezekiel 3:16-5:17 is a single literary unit that begins, "At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me" (**3:16**). The next unit will likewise begin, "The Word

of the LORD came to me...” (6:1). It takes place seven days after the massively important first three chapters which saw Ezekiel being brought into the heavenly divine council through a vision of one like a human being who is seated on his divine chariot throne being attended and guarded by bizarre cherubim creatures. Ezekiel has now, as Jeremiah puts it, “stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word” (Jer 23:18, 22). He has been greatly humbled by his encounter. He has been set apart for a particularly daunting task. And now, it is about to unfold.

Our passage takes place as the beginning of a series of chapters dealing with judgment being proclaimed upon Israel. The text itself seems to me to best fit a simple outline:

1. Ezekiel’s Commission as Watchman (3:16–21)
2. Ezekiel’s Binding and Muteness (3:22–27)
3. Sign-Acts of Jerusalem’s Siege and Judgment (4:1–5:4)
4. God’s Explanation of Judgment (5:5–17)

The sign acts (#3) are by far the most dominant feature of this story, and they have been discussed a lot by scholars. Some suggest that there are four¹ or five² of them. Heiser

¹ Cf. Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 23.

² Cf. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, vol. 28, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1994), 55.

suggests there are [nine of them](#),³ and I'm going to go with this because of how it relates to a prior series of signs in the book of Exodus.

What is their function? There are five suggestions out there. [1](#). Sign-acts are efficacious, creating the reality they express by the power of God. [2](#). Sign-acts are prophetic dramas which express reality. [3](#). Sign-acts are used to legitimate and authenticate a prophet's status. [4](#). Sign-acts are a form of street theater, a way to attract attention through vivid actions. [5](#). Sign-acts are a type of nonverbal communication used to persuade an audience of the prophet's message.⁴ I see no reason why these can't be complementary. For today's sermon I'm going to be following a few portions of the only person I've ever heard preach on these chapters: D. A. Carson in his amazing sermon that he's delivered on a number of occasions.⁵

³ [Michael S. Heiser](#), "[Naked Bible 114: Ezekiel 4-5](#)," *The Naked Bible Podcast* (Aug 21, 2016). Link includes audio, pdf transcript, and link to pdf referenced in the show.

⁴ [Kelvin Friebe](#), "A Hermeneutical Paradigm for Interpreting Prophetic Sign-Actions," *Didaskalia* 12.2 (2001): 29-38. Cited in [R. Andrew Compton](#), "[The Sign-Acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 Formative Rituals of Priestly Identity](#)," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 29 (2018): 51-52. A new book on sign-acts is *Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Methods and Interpretation*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 562, ed. [Tyler D. Mayfield](#) and Penelope Barter (Boston: De Gruyter, 2025).

⁵ I first heard this sermon around 1998 when he came to Denver Seminary and I was blown away that anyone would even attempt to preach such a text, let alone do the masterful job that he did. You can hear a more recent version at [Don Carson](#), "[Divine Judgment and Symbolism: An Analysis of Ezekiel 4-5](#)," *TGC* (May 14, 2009).

Ezekiel's Commission as Watchman (3:16-21)

We begin in **Ezek 3:16**. “And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me.” This follows the pattern begun in **1:3** where the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel. The first time this ever happens in the Bible, the word of the Lord comes to Abram *in a vision* (**Gen 15:1**). The word then speaks, “I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” Abram immediately calls the word “Lord God” (*'adonay yehwih*). The Word of God is a person; The Word is God (**John 1:1**).

The Word speaks, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me” (**Ezek 3:17**). The Targum says, “When you hear a word from My *Memra*...” or literally, “When you hear a word from my Word,” confirming that the Jews themselves believed that the Word is God.

Ezekiel is being made a watchman over Israel—that is, over the totality of the nation, wherever they happen to be at the moment. Block explains, “The noun *šōpeh* derives from a common root meaning ‘to look out, to spy, to keep watch’ ... Persons chosen for sentry duty were generally stationed on lookout towers strategically placed on the walls of

the city, the roofs of gatehouses (2 Sam. 18:24), or towers outside the city (2 K. 9:17). The watchman's charge involved paying careful attention to the enemy's movements. In the face of an imminent attack, he would blow his horn (*šōpār*), summoning the soldiers to arms, and civilians to take cover (Ezek 33:3–6).”⁶ In other words, Ezekiel is being given a military commission by the King who, apparently, is about to go to war. **Who is the enemy? Israel in her sin.**

God has a **warning for Ezekiel**. “If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand” (18). This is a great burden, and if Ezekiel is representative of any of those in our own day who are likewise given the calling of faithfully proclaiming God’s word—that is the Holy Scripture—to the people, woe to those who refuse to speak the truth, God will hold them accountable.

But there’s **good news**: “If you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul” (19). If he tells the people what God says, their blood

⁶ Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 144.

will not be on his hands. However, this is such a serious charge that the Lord basically repeats it in the next verse, only this time, rather than go after the wicked, he goes after the righteous who turns from his righteousness and commits injustice. God says he is going to “lay a stumbling block before him” and “he shall die.” We are getting but the first taste of an entire six course meal of judgment that is to come in the following chapters. This is not the God we often hear about in today’s churches. But it is the God of the Bible.

He tells the prophet that because you have not warned him, he will still die for his sin and even his righteous deeds will not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand (20). However, “If you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul” (21). This gives one of the rare glimpses at grace and the possibility of repentance that will only be implicit as we move along. It is important to remember something that we will come to in a later chapter, that God does not delight in the death of the wicked, but that he should turn from his evil ways and do good. If you do not have this as your anchor, then you may not be able to handle the God you are about to see.

Ezekiel's Binding and Muteness (3:22-27)

We come to [the second of our four main headings](#) in our text. In it, the “[Hand of the Lord](#)” comes upon Ezekiel and he said, “[Arise, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you](#)” (22). The hand speaks? Yes, because it is the military hand of God, his Right-Hand, the Divine Warrior, the Word of God.

Ezekiel doesn't know what is in store, so he rises and goes into the valley and “[Behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the Chebar canal, and I fell on my face](#)” (23). The tendency of the majority of theologians is to anthropomorphize the Lord “standing” here. But that's a big word. What is an [Anthropomorphism](#)? It is attributing human characteristics, behaviors, or forms to God that describe him in ways relatable to human experience. Now, it is quite true that God in his essence does not have human attributes. God is spirit and omnipresent. However, God has just manifested himself to Ezekiel as one “[like a human being](#)” (1:26). This was God coming to him as a Person, particularly [the Second Person](#)—the Son of God who somehow appears to him like a human being. Humans are quite capable of “standing.” This is a real, embodied

presence of Christ before Ezekiel—not of the Divine Essence of God, which would have incinerated Ezekiel on the spot. This is God clothing himself for the prophet’s sake. Yet, the result of seeing this is still that Ezekiel falls on his face. He knows whose presence he is now in.

But, as happened in 2:1, “The Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet” (3:24). The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, now intercedes for the Prophet who sees the living Word of God! And the Spirit now speaks to him, “Go, shut yourself within your house.” The Spirit now speaks as if he is God, just as the Second Person did earlier.

Why must Ezekiel shut himself in his house? It prepares not only him, but is also a warning to Israel. The Spirit commands, “Behold, cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people. And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house” (3:25–26). This seems to contradict his watchman role to warn the people. How can he warn if mute and bound? As the “son of man,” Ezekiel embodies Israel’s priestly intercessor. His cords symbolize their coming captivity in Babylon. However, these cords also echo priestly garments that bear Israel’s tribes through the Ephod and Breastplate (Ex 28:12). As a priest, Ezekiel’s

binding is thus tied directly to Israel. He is a living example of them.⁷

Furthermore, God ensures Ezekiel can speak divine words. His muteness is selective. “But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house” (27). Thus, the binding makes him a living sign, proclaiming judgment nonverbally. His body, not his voice, warns the “rebellious house,” setting the stage for the shocking sign-acts to come.

This “rebellious house” cannot be understated. In fact, this phrase has already occurred six times, and this makes the perfect seventh (2:5, 6, 7, 8, 3:9, 26, 27). “One of the great burdens of Ezekiel’s ministry was that Jerusalem and Judah were far more wicked than anyone thought,” D. A. Carson says. Thus, God has determined to destroy them. He adds, “Can you imagine what that message sounded like to the exiles? If Ezekiel was right, they were not going home because pretty soon there was not going to be a home to go to.” And Ezekiel will say nothing at all except the specific revelation God has given him. His silence is speaking volumes. “I will

⁷ See Margaret S. Odell, “You Are What You Eat: Ezekiel and the Scroll,” *JBL* 117.2 (1998): 236, 38. Cited in Compton, 63-64.

say nothing. No comment. No salutations on the street. Nothing until God gives me something to say, and then I will say it.' This will have the effect, you see, of making those words astonishingly weighty."⁸

Some people speak, speak, and speak even more. **They can't help but talk.** Frankly, it is rare to find someone who will actually ask you questions and then listen. This is the opposite. How much more to today's world where everyone feels the need to speak about everything! This is the definition of social media, as people unload absolutely anything they can on anyone willing to read them. And in a world where everything is important, nothing actually is. But God still has weighty things to say today. He's saying them right now. Are you listening or only continuing to speak?

Sign-Acts of Jerusalem's Siege and Judgment 4:1-5:4

We now come to **the sign-acts properly speaking**. They probably take place at or near his house. I imagine Ezekiel living in close quarters with all the other exiles to Babylon. It was a small community, around 10,000 at the time. And what he will do would surely have garnered an ever growing audience.

⁸ All quotes here from Carson.

The first sign is **Ezek 4:1-2**. Basically, Ezekiel is going to play **army men** on his front porch. “**And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem. And put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.**” Ezekiel takes a **large, sunbaked clay tablet** and draws the **city of Jerusalem** on it. We actually have an example of such a thing from the city of Umma (see below). He clearly makes it so that everyone watching knows what it is.



(Left) Map of the city of Umma on clay tablet; Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre; (Right) Assyrian relief of city attacked with battering ram, Wikimedia, Caryn Reeder, courtesy of the British Museum⁹

⁹ Both in **John H. Walton**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 413, 14.

Then he starts playing model war. He makes siege ramps. We have reliefs from Babylon that show exactly what it might have looked like (above). If you've seen *Lord of the Rings*, you have a pretty good idea. In a siege, people inside a walled city are first starved out, if possible, by cutting off the food supply. As you do this, you might build siege ramps, such as the incredible ramp still preserved at the ancient Jewish fortress of Masada, where 6,000-8,000 Roman soldiers, camping throughout the local desert took anywhere between a month to a year building it just so they could attack the poor souls hiding out on top of the fortress. Imagine Ezekiel, your neighbor in exile, saying absolutely nothing, starting out with this dramatic scene which he himself could have taken weeks to build up. You've already been taken from the land, but now your thoughts can't help but think about all your loved ones still there, even inside Jerusalem. What is he trying to tell you?



Masada. Drone footage of the ramp with camps in the foreground.

Screenshot from Jeffery Worthington, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t38sBuQ7pQ&ab_channel=jpworthingtonmedia.

The second sign act begins in **vs. 3**. Ezekiel is to take **an iron griddle**, something akin to a wok. He then is to set his face toward it, glaring at it, as he holds the pan precariously over the city, saying nothing. For how long? For how many days? For how long each day? We have no idea. But the point is, a huge iron pan over a city made of clay with siegeworks all around it, represents a massive, merciless force that is set to strike at any moment, smashing the city to ruins. With but a word, **Jerusalem will be obliterated**.

Vv. 4-8 see a dramatic shift in imagery composed of *three things*. The first is that the prophet is to **lie on his left side** and so “**place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it**.” If

he were facing north, the direction of the incoming army and of the northern kingdom of Israel now already in ruins from the Assyrian captivity, then his whole body would be facing Israel from Babylon and his front porch. He is to lay this way for 390 days. In the words of Fran Tarkington, “*That’s incredible.*” Again, for how long each day? We aren’t told, but you can bet it was for a long time each day.

390 is a number that no one understands. Counting backwards from Ezekiel, it comes close to the onset of the northern rebellion under king Jeroboam in 931 BC, which is perhaps the meaning of vs. 5’s, “I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel.” But Israel wasn’t actually being punished for that long. The LXX reads 150 years, perhaps trying it to the Flood’s 150 days that the waters prevailed (Gen 7:24). However, it is possible that this is a kind of symbolic year-gone-wrong, with 360 x 12 monthly cycles plus an extra 30 days representing a kind of final “month” of grace.

Whatever the case, in vs. 6 it shifts. Imagine it. You are an onlooker, wondering at what this strange prophet is doing. Every day after work you walk past his siegeworks and he is laying on his side, saying nothing. Day 1, 2, 7, 10, 20. 50 days pass. Then 100. Then 200. Then 300. Then 350,

360, 380, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390 ... nothing changes for over a year! But **suddenly, the next day**, you discover the prophet has changed directions. Now, he is laying on his *right* side, likely facing south. “**And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year**” (**vs. 6**). He is to set his face towards the siege of Jerusalem now, with **arm bared**, and he shall prophecy against the city (**7**). His bared arm is the second sign of this section, and the fourth overall, after laying on his sides.

Again, **40** is a number that doesn't make a lot of sense. 70 is a number we might expect, as Jeremiah predicted they would be in captivity for 70 years (**Jer 25:11-12**). However, we know that 40 is a number deeply tied to periods of testing and judgment. 40 days in **Noah's ark**. 40 years in **the wilderness**. 40 days of **Jesus' temptation**.

The text says that Ezekiel is “**to bear their iniquity**.” Unfortunately, the Hebrew here is ambiguous and we don't know if he is actually bearing their sin or bearing their judgment. If Ezekiel were **bearing Israel's judgment**, it would mean he symbolically endures the consequences of their sin, such as exile and having to go through with these signs. If he were **bearing their sin**, it would mean he acts as a priestly

mediator, ritually carrying their guilt before God, akin to atonement rituals, to highlight their moral culpability. Because he is a God's prophet, it might mean the former. Because he is a priest, it might mean the latter. The reality is these are not mutually exclusive.

The fifth sign appears (third in this section). God is placing **corde**s upon Ezekiel again, but so that he cannot turn from one side to the other, until he has completed the days of the siege (8). He appears to somehow be bound up, suffering on his side, unable to move. Clearly, not 24 hours a day, as it would make eating and drinking and personal hygiene totally impossible. Nevertheless, reading it, we get the impression that this would have been a brutal siege *on Ezekiel*! No wonder he had to have the vision from Ch. 1 to keep him pressing ahead. This likely complements the cords of the previous chapter that identify the priest with the people.

Vs. 9 gives us *a sixth sign-act*. We will call it the **ration**s act. At Masada, the story goes that the night before the Romans finally penetrated the fortress, all but a handful of women and children committed suicide so that the Romans could do nothing more to the poor people. Israel won't be so lucky. Ezekiel now is commanded to take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer (spelt), and put them into a single vessel and make bread from them. You don't

make bread from the latter four. He is to eat this nasty concoction of disgusting quasi-flour vegetables dried together with grain to represent *the bare rations* for every day that he lies on his side.

And Ezekiel will *not be allowed to eat much*. Only twenty shekels a day (10) along with just a sixth part of a hin of water (11). This equates to *8 oz. of bread* a day, or just a small loaf, and about *16 oz. of water*. This is barely enough to stay alive. And he must do this for over a year, while lying tied up on his side. Do you see the symbolism when taken with the siege? If you still don't, you will soon enough.

So how is he to cook it? Here's where things get the most memorable in *the seventh sign-act*. When you are under siege, you eventually run out of firewood. So what is left to use? Ezekiel is to bake it in their sight—so they can see him do it ... *on human dung* (12)! To quote Carson, “*You use shit. It's the same word for both cows and human beings. We use excrement for one and dung for the other, because we're polite, but in point of fact, you're using manure*” because it burns. Of course, that's not a word we are supposed to use in a sermon. I'm sorry if that offends you, but we need to be offended somehow by this story. What Israel has done is much more offensive than this word. Which bothers you more? The word or their sins? People need to feel this in

their bones, as Israel would have when they read **vs. 13**, “And the Lord said, ‘Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them.’”

For Ezekiel the priest, this is **too much to bear**. He has kept utterly silent until now. But this demands a word. He tells the Lord God, “Behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth” (**14**). He is referencing a passage like **Deut 23:12-14**, where **human feces is considered unclean**. Ezekiel has been strict follower of Mosaic law, as all priests were to be.

One of the funnier lines, albeit darker humor in the Bible comes next as **the Lord concedes**. Fine. “I assign to you cow’s dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread” (**15**). It’s a concession to a priest so that he may remain ritually clean. But it’s not much better; it’s still poop!

What’s the point of all this? The last two verses of the chapter tell us. “Moreover, he said to me, ‘Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in

dismay, and rot away because of their punishment” (16-17). But this is only the beginning.

Summarizing, **verses 1 to 3** drive home the inevitability of the siege of Jerusalem under the judgment of God. **Verses 4 to 8** drive home the duration of the banishment. **Verses 9 to 17** drive home the famine conditions of siege and exile. We have **two more sign-acts** to go before finishing off with the larger explanation for those Israelites too dull to figure out what pictures are in front of them.

In *the eighth sign*, the son of man next takes **a sharp sword** (5:1). Is he going to strike someone with it? No. He uses it as a **barber's razor**, passing over his head and beard. He is **shaving** himself. In other places in the bible, this is a symbol of mourning (**Job 1:20**), captivity (**Deut 21:12-13**), and punishment (**2Sam 10:4-5**). But this is shocking and awful symbolism for a priest's dignity as **Lev 21:5** forbids priests from doing this. It thus **exposes him to public disgrace and mocking**, all while he is not allowed to say anything in return. Remind you of anyone in the NT? “**Like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth**” (**Acts 8:32; Isa 53:7**). Jesus!

He is to then **weigh and divide his hair evenly** and in thirds. On the day his siege is completed, he is to take a third and **burn it in the fire** in the middle of his army-man city

(**Ezek 5:2**). He is to take the next third and in an act that would make him look like a wild lunatic, take his sword and start **whacking the pieces** of the hair as they fall to the ground throughout his model city. Slicing, dicing, cutting, thrashing the hair until all that is left are tiny little pieces (**2b**).

The last third takes us to *the final sign-act*. He is to tuck away a small number of remaining hairs into the skirt of his robe (**3**). He then **waits for a windy day** where he throws most into the air, scattering them to the wind, for God “**will unsheathe the sword after them**” (**2b**). Of those few hairs that remain, he is then to pull some out and cast them into the fire and burn them for “**a fire will come out into all the house of Israel**” (**4**). This leaves only a handful or remnant of hairs left.

God's Explanation of Judgment (5:5-17)

It is at this point that we finally begin to learn what all of this memorable play-acting of signs in total silence from a now haggard, bald, half-starved prophet was for, over a year after it all began. “**Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her**” (**5**). This describes Israel's station

in the land of Canaan, surrounded by foreign peoples on a track of land that is central to all commerce between Egypt, Babylon, and what will in a century or two become known as Europe.

“And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes” (6). God is not doing this because he is capricious or vindictive. Rather, this is the hand of Justice coming down on people who utterly deserve it. Israel has become worse than the nations around her, having not walked in God’s statutes or rules, nor even of according to the rules of the nations around her (7). This is true evil. Those nations followed codes like Hammurabi, given by treacherous gods, permitting the worship of almost any god, no laws against things like homosexuality or temple prostitution, pardons for adultery (Ham 129), lighter penalties for incest (Ham 154), mere fines for some forms of rape (Middle Assyrian Law A12) or bestiality (Hittite 199), and they neglected widows and orphans, offering only narrow inheritance protections (e.g. Ham 177, 137; MA A46).

Thus, God tells us in no uncertain terms, “Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations” (8). God? Against his

own people? We are told today that **Israel is incapable of doing anything wrong**, no matter what it is, much less that they could ever be out of God's favor, much less be on the receiving end of his wrath. God's chosen people and all that. Yet, here it is, plain as day.

God says, “**And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again**” (9). It is a warning that tells us this is as bad as it can get. But what exactly will happen? The truly unthinkable. **They will become cannibals.** “**Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers**” (10). This is explicitly predicted in **Lev 26:29**, “**You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters**” (cf. **Deut 29:53-57**).

It has been as few as 684 and perhaps as many as 860 years since the predictions were given. **People surely thought that God had forgotten.** Make no mistake. God does not forget his promises, for judgment or for grace. “**And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds**” (10b).

What have they done specifically? They have **defiled God's sanctuary** with all manner of “**detestable things and**

with all their abominations” (11).¹⁰ These refer to idolatrous practices that they literally brought into the temple. Ezekiel will tell us for example about an “Image of Jealousy” set up at the northern gate of the temple (Ezek 8:5). It could be an image of Baal or Asherah or *someone else*. This is just one example and we will see many more as we continue through the book. Jeremiah also notes that they even practiced human child sacrifice (Jer 7:30-31; 32:35) in the temple precinct. For now, this was the big crime, now bringing the hammer down. Their time is nearing an end.

God continues with a very important statement, “Therefore I will withdraw” (Ezek 5:11b). This foreshadows the Glory depart the temple, something unthinkable to ancient Jews who believed their status as the chosen people was absolutely unconditional no matter what they did. They were sorely mistaken. And the reason so many today continue to teach this nonsense is because they refuse to read God’s word.

“My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all

¹⁰ “Abominations” (siqqusim) are unspecified deities and their respective cults. M. I. Gruber, “Abomination,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 3.

around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them” (11c-12). This explains the hair signs.

“Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them” (13). Our Confession of Faith speaks about God being “without body, parts, or passions” (LBC 2.1). This would seem to deny what is before us, for here God is both angry, furious, and jealous. But the Confession speaks of God in his Essence, his Nature.

It says nothing about God in his Persons. Think about the Son of God who wept and laughed and mourned and got angry. As before, Jesus was not consumed by these things, nor controlled by them. But they were part of him, for he was fully human. This is why we must remember that we are dealing here in Ezekeil not with the Divine Nature, whatever that would even mean, but with the Second Person of the Trinity. This is why exegesis is so vital. This is not God in his bare essence, but the Image of God to man—the Word and Arm of God. He perfectly embodies proper emotional reactions then as he does in the NT, never controlled by passions, but nevertheless embodying them in his person.

A further word about God “speaking in jealousy” is important (13). For what is there to be jealous of regarding offenses such as idolatry if there is nothing real on the other side? Too many people have so desupernaturalized the Bible that they think the gods are not real. Is God really getting jealous of the Flying Spaghetti Monster? That’s absurd. He is jealous because real created heavenly fallen beings have led Israel astray and caused them to commit spiritual adultery with the God who has taken them to be his spouse in covenantal marriage. Adultery only works if there’s someone to commit it with. And that’s why God is so jealous and full of wrath. His wife has been unfaithful for 800 years and it only continues to get worse.

He goes on to promise that he will make them a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations in the sight of all who pass by (14). They will become a taunt and a warning and a horror to all the nations around (15a), as he executes his judgments in anger and fury. The nations will see that their God is real, and wonder at what Israel had done to deserve such a violent desolation, death, and captivity.

Vs. 16 has a fascinating reference to “deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction” which God sends to break their supply of bread and starve his people. But as Heiser points out, this is a strange metaphor. Certainly we associate

arrows with a siege and with death, but with a famine? But an Israelite would have understood, and it is ironic given that they have given themselves over to the worship of the gods.

Enter *Resheph*. Though not a word used here, the word is translated as “**plague**” in places such as **Deut 32:23-25** and **Hab 3:5**. In Deuteronomy, it appears alongside of *keteb* (“bitter destruction”) and *ra‘ab* (“hunger/famine”) the word used in **Ezekiel 5:16**. The thing is, *Resheph* is a **deity**, and possibly so is *Keteb*. He (via their worship of Nergal worshiped in Israel; 2Kgs 17:30, whom *DDD* identifies with *Resheph*) could well have been among the abominations they set in the temple. The thing specifically about *Resheph* is that **his symbol was the arrow** (hence, “deadly arrows of famine”). In Habakkuk he seems to come as part of God’s heavenly entourage,¹¹ his council, a subordinate created entity that must carry out God’s judgement on those to whom it has been decreed. It would be truly ironic if God used the very gods Israel worshiped to carry out judgment against them.

¹¹ **Gregorio del Olmo Lete**, “Deber,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 232. See also **P. Xella**, “*Resheph*,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 700–701.

The next and **last verse** of our passage takes it a step further. In **Heb 3:5**, Resheph is accompanied by **Deber** (pestilence), a kind of **nocturnal demon** that is also found in the very supernatural Psalm 91 (**vs. 6**). And thus it ends, “**I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence (Deber) and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord; I have spoken**” (**Ezek 5:17**).

Implications

Obviously, these signs and their purpose are **singularly targeted at God’s people** because of the vile wickedness they had been committing for so long. The time of that rebellion was now over. God’s patience had run out. He would tolerate no more, as his own bride had now become worse than the nations around them.

Carson explains that it is a constant principle throughout God’s word that **to whom much is given, much shall be required**. Jesus told **Capernaum and Bethsaida**, *Woe to you! If the gospel and miracles performed in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon—the pagan cities up the coast—they would have repented. If they had been preached in **Sodom and Gomorrah**, they would still be here today*. It is a burdensome responsibility that comes to a

people when the Gospel has been spread so widely through its civilization.

And this, beloved, is precisely what has happened more to [Europe and America](#) than anywhere else. And oh, [the depths to which we have fallen](#). Specifically, there is no other language on earth that has been granted such good gifts of the gospel and a Christian heritage than [English](#). Nothing comes even remotely close. The Puritans, the songs, the commentaries, the churches.

Where do you suppose the nation like we have become will be that has risen to such heights through the gospel, even having boldly dared enter into a covenant with God as they crossed an ocean in order to start a new society in a new world? A nation that laughs at justice, that warps sexuality, that makes truth relative, whose leadership is bribed and perverted and launders money, whose industry sells sex, drugs (*pharmakeia*), and hedonism, and [whose churches](#) look exactly like the world in their worship, in their dress, in their speech, in their conduct, in their private lives?

Yes, it is especially [to the church](#) that such a warning as this must be heeded, for who is the covenant community in the NT? It isn't America, as much as the Puritans wanted it to be. It isn't Britain. It isn't even the nation of Israel—much

to the dismay of some. It is the church. We are those now in covenant with this God.

Israel's rebellion, like a festering wound, had grown worse than the nations around her, and God's patience was spent. As Carson notes, God's judgment had four purposes: to vent His righteous anger against sin, to make Israel know He is the Lord who acts, to humble them as a reproach before the nations, and to destroy the unrepentant. As we have seen, this includes sometimes through created agents like Resheph. These sign-acts—Ezekiel's brick, griddle, bound body, and shaved hair—echo the plagues of Egypt, where God judged a rebellious nation. Just as Moses' staff brought blood, frogs, and darkness, Ezekiel's silent suffering warned of famine, pestilence, and exile. Yet, like the blood on Egypt's doorposts sparing a remnant, Ezekiel's few hairs tucked in his robe whisper hope—a promise of survival for those who repent.

Death comes as judgment against sin. It's why we all die. It's why everyone died in [the Flood](#). This was the cumulative judgment of God upon the entire world. It is why [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) were destroyed. It is why [Egypt](#) was destroyed. Curiously, there is a virtual parallel with Ezekiel's sign acts and the plagues of Egypt. Both begin with the

prophet's mouth—Moses stutters; Ezekiel is not allowed to speak. Then come a series of nine, which can be bunched into a 3x3 weave (see below). The plagues end in the death of the firstborn; Ezekiel's sign-acts end in the death of the remnant, but with hope for survival.

Plagues of Egypt		
Col 1	Col 2	Col 3
Blood	Frogs	Lice
Mixture	Pestilence	Boils
Hail	Locust	Darkness
Death of Firstborn		

Ezekiel's Sign-Acts		
Col 1	Col 2	Col 3
Brick	Griddle	Lying
Bared arm	Tying	Rations
Dung	Hair	Remnant
A Few Survive		

Hear this poetic vision of Ezekiel's call:

In Babylon's dust, Ezekiel stands,
 a Moses reborn, his **mouth** sealed by heaven's hand.
 His **brick** is Egypt's Nile, red with shame;
 his **griddle**, a darkness no lamp can tame.
Arm bared, he **lies**, **bound**, as Israel's sins weigh down,
 like boils on Egypt's prideful crown.
 His **bread**, **defiled**, is locusts' feast reversed;
 his **hair**, scattered, is hail's curse.
 Yet in his robe, a **remnant** hides,
 like blood on doors where mercy bides.
 The firstborn fell, Egypt's heart was rent;

Israel's hope lives in hairs God sent.
Ezekiel weaves the plagues anew,
for Jerusalem's Egypt, judged but true.
His silence sings what Moses spoke:
God's voice will mend what rebellion broke.

We could trace these kinds of themes all the way through the OT and on into the New, especially with Jesus in his Olivet Discourse using a phrase that comes right from our passage, “There will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (Matt 24:21; Ezek 5:9). In my understanding, this is apocalyptic and *cyclical* language, first found here, then in 70 AD, and then throughout history as nations fall, on up to the final short season of Satan. The warnings to the churches in Revelation 2-3 are part of this cycle.

But it is not to the Second Coming and final judgment that our hearts must finally turn, but rather to the First. Like Graham Hess in *Signs*, who saw chaos in crop circles, strange water glasses, and a dying wife's words, you might miss God's plan in Ezekiel's shocking acts. But just as those signs ultimately were predestined to save Graham's family, Ezekiel's signs point to a greater hope. Jesus, the ultimate Son of Man, became the greatest sign-act on the cross (John 3:14-

15), death and resurrection (**Matt 12:39**). He bore our iniquity, like Ezekiel's cords, and faced the sword of God's wrath, like the scattered hairs. He was smashed to pieces like Jerusalem, because of our sin. But his death satisfied Justice, sparing a remnant—us—who trust in Him. **In 2025**, as our world and churches mirror Israel's rebellion, his people called by his name must heed Ezekiel's warning: repent and turn from your sin, look to the cross, and find restoration in the God who judges and saves in Jesus Christ. As Graham's faith was restored, so can ours be, through Christ, the sign that never fails.

Appendix: Parallels Between Exodus 7–12 and Ezekiel 3:22–27, 4:1–5:4

The table below aligns the structural, thematic, and theological parallels between the Ten Plagues in Exodus 7–12 and the nine sign-acts with muteness in Ezekiel 3:22–27 and 4:1–5:4, using the English Standard Version (ESV). The parallels reflect a deliberate evocation of the Exodus narrative to portray Israel's judgment as a new “Egypt,” with a woven text structure revealing a divine message, per Moshe Kline's framework.

Exodus 7–12 (Ten Plagues)

Preparatory Act

Moses' Commission and Serpent Sign (7:1–13)

- God commissions Moses and Aaron; Aaron's staff becomes a serpent, outdoing Pharaoh's magicians (7:10–12).
- Establishes divine authority and prophetic role.
- Moses' reluctance to speak (4:10: "I am slow of speech") is overcome by God's promise: "I will be with your mouth" (4:12).

Nine Core Acts/Plagues

Nine Plagues in Three Sets (7:14–10:29)

- Organized in three sets of three, per Kline's weave (Exodus 10:1–2), with distinct introductions and agents:
- **Set 1 (7:14–8:19)**: Blood (7:14–24), frogs (8:1–15), lice (8:16–19) – Aaron as agent, targeting Egypt's environment.
- **Set 2 (8:20–9:12)**: Flies (8:20–32), livestock (9:1–7), boils (9:8–12) – Mixed agents, escalating harm.
- **Set 3 (9:13–10:29)**: Hail (9:13–35), locusts (10:1–20), darkness (10:21–29) – Moses as agent, cosmic in scope.
- Progress from natural to supernatural, humiliating Egypt's gods (12:12).

Climactic Resolution

Death of the Firstborn (11:1–12:36)

- Tenth plague: Death of Egypt's firstborn (12:29–30) breaks Pharaoh's resistance, freeing Israel.
- Targets Egypt's future (heirs) and gods (12:12).
- Passover spares Israel's firstborn, marking them as God's "remnant" (4:22: "Israel is my firstborn son").
- Culminates in exodus and covenant renewal.

Ezekiel 3:22–27, 4:1–5:4 (Muteness & Sign-Acts)

Muteness of the Prophet (3:22–27)

- God binds Ezekiel and makes him mute, only speaking when God opens his mouth (3:26–27: "I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth").
- Establishes Ezekiel as God's controlled instrument, akin to a sign (3:27).
- Parallels Moses' speech hesitation, with divine control over the prophet's mouth.

Nine Sign-Acts in 3x3 Grid (4:1–5:4)

- Organized in a 3x3 woven grid, consecutive and non-repetitive:
- **Row 1 (Siege Setup)**: Brick siege (4:1–2), griddle barrier (4:3), lying on sides (4:4–6) – Establishes Jerusalem's siege and iniquity.
- **Row 2 (Prophetic Constraints)**: Bared arm prophecy (4:7), tying with ropes (4:8), rationed food (4:9–11) – Ezekiel's restricted role.
- **Row 3 (Judgment and Hope)**: Defiled bread (4:12–15), hair division (5:1–2), remnant (5:3–4) – Destruction with hope.
- Portrays Jerusalem's fall, inverting Israel's redemption into judgment.

Remnant Preservation (5:3–4)

- Final sign-act: Ezekiel saves a few hairs, binding them in his robe (5:3: "take from these a small number"), symbolizing a preserved remnant.
- Some hairs burned (5:4), but survival points to hope amidst destruction.
- Parallels Passover's sparing, with hairs as a new "blood on doors," signaling divine mercy.
- Foreshadows restoration post-exile.

Theme of Mouths

- Moses' slow speech (4:10) is empowered by God (4:12: "I will be with your mouth"). Aaron speaks for him.
- Plagues involve consumption: frogs (8:6), locusts (10:14–15) "eat" Egypt's vitality; Passover lamb eaten (12:8–11).
- Pharaoh's "closed mouth" (hardened heart, 7:13) resists until broken by firstborn's death.
- Mouth symbolizes prophetic authority and covenant obedience.

Theological Intent

- Judgment on Egypt's pride and gods (12:12: "execute judgments on all the gods of Egypt").
- Pharaoh's hardened heart (7:14, 8:15) invites escalating plagues.
- Israel redeemed as God's "firstborn" (4:22), establishing covenant (12:31–50).
- Plagues display God's power for future generations (10:2: "that you may tell...how I dealt harshly with Egypt").¹²

- Ezekiel's muteness (3:26: "tongue cling to the roof of your mouth") is divinely controlled, speaking only God's words (3:27).
- Sign-acts involve consumption: rationed food (4:9–11), defiled bread (4:12–15) symbolize scarcity and shame.
- Ezekiel's silence mirrors Pharaoh's resistance, awaiting divine opening (later fulfilled, 33:21–22).
- Mouth signifies prophetic submission and Israel's defilement.
- Judgment on Jerusalem's pride and rebellion (5:6: "she has rebelled against my rules").
- Israel's hardened heart (2:3–4: "impudent and stubborn") invites siege, like plagues.
- Remnant preserved (5:3–4), foreshadowing new covenant post-exile.
- Sign-acts warn exiles, portraying Israel as new "Egypt," yet with hope (5:4: "fire will come out into all the house of Israel").

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¹² For a short video on the "weave" of the Ten Plagues, see Moshe Kline, "[The Lord Spike to Moses in Tables: Part 2](#)," *YouTube* (Nov 10, 2010). Part I is [here](#).

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