



PRAYER

POSTURE OF PRAYER

EZEKIEL 4:1-8

MAIN IDEA

God takes sin seriously and His people should too, or they will face serious consequences.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Think about various movies you've watched over the years and the impact they have had on you. Certain lines of dialogue have become part of culture decades after being spoken in a movie.

Consider why famous lines take on such life and become familiar to people generations later, who may not have even seen the film. The memorable scenes that accompany the dialogue causes our minds to hold on to them. They leave a lasting impression. Today, we are studying a passage where the Lord directed his prophet to act out a message so that the people couldn't mistake or ignore His intention.

- **What is a line from a movie or TV show that you quote often?**

SUMMARY

During the Israelite exile in Babylon, God charged Ezekiel the prophet with an interesting assignment. Using dramatic action, Ezekiel was to paint a picture of judgment coming to Jerusalem due to the sin of the people. He made a model of the city and placed himself in certain postures and positions to represent the years of sin and rebellion of Jerusalem and Judah.

The Lord drew attention to how He feels about sin and the serious consequences that occur when God's people refuse to live faithfully and obediently. Ezekiel depicted physically what was happening to the Israelites spiritually so they wouldn't miss the message.

- **What is it about that line or scene that has stuck with you?**
- **How have you experienced the combination of drama and dialogue creating a memorable effect?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read Ezekiel 4:1-3.

As God's prophet to the people, Ezekiel was tasked with conveying messages from the Lord to His people. Typically, he would speak or preach the truths or warnings from God that applied to the people's current situation. Today's passage includes unusual instruction from God for Ezekiel. Sometimes, God's words aren't taken as seriously as they should be, or He desires to give more emphasis. In this case, He gave His prophet a different angle to take so the people would pay close attention and give the message the consideration it deserved.

- **What are some things that might distract us from receiving the truths of God? How can we guard against this?**

Ezekiel's main audience was the Israelites, who had been taken captive years earlier in a siege and who currently lived in Babylon. While in this foreign land, the people still had opportunity to be faithful to the Lord. They kept their hope of returning to Jerusalem in the forefront of their minds, and they longed for the day they would be home again.

As you study these verses, think of the events along the lines of a drama, much like a play or a visual illustration. This divine message was designed by God using Ezekiel as the central figure so it would not be overlooked or ignored. Because of the people's tendency to turn away from the Lord, the Israelites faced judgment from God. Ezekiel's one-man drama was intended to give a picture of the consequence to come.

- **When have you needed to receive a message in a different way than simply being told? How do we see God's kindness to His people in these actions?**

The Lord told Ezekiel to make a miniature image of a scene in Jerusalem. He was to arrange a siege wall complete with battering rams and enemy camps. Ezekiel performed this dramatic illustration in public so many could see what was happening. When the people looked at the model Jerusalem and what Ezekiel was placing around it, they would have recognized it as a siege situation. God was making His message crystal clear.

Central to Ezekiel's message was the truth that God takes sin very seriously. Since the people had continued in sin and rebellion, the Israelites needed a strong reminder that God is always holy and just and sin has consequences.

- **Application: Where do you need to remember that God takes sin seriously? How does a wrong understanding in this area impact all of life?**

> Have someone in your group read Ezekiel 4:4-6.

Continuing the message from the Lord, Ezekiel was to lie on his left side for 390 days. Each day represented a year of Israel's punishment. It also signified the symbolic weight of a priest carrying the sins of the people.

- **Ezekiel’s literal posture changed in accordance with God’s instruction. How likely are you to obey God in a similar detailed way? How do we see to “align our posture” to God daily?**

Ezekiel was to lay on one side and then the other in obedience to God’s command. Think about the way Ezekiel stood for the Lord to the Israelites and how his own obedience spoke volumes as he led by example. Ezekiel was no stranger to proclaiming God’s message so the people would respond. He knew what was at stake, and he was a willing participant in God’s work.

After the first 390 days of lying on his side to symbolically bear the iniquity of Israel, he was then instructed to lay on his other side for forty days to bear the iniquity of Judah. This was a day for each year of their disobedience. The point was not just that God takes sin seriously and sin has consequences but that the consequences are serious. Ezekiel physically endured hardship to make the point so that the people couldn’t ignore it or pretend it wasn’t for them.

Consider what this message has to do with believers today. We don’t have to go to a priest to physically hand over the weight of our sin. We live on this side of the cross, so Jesus has done that for us once for all. But it remains crucial that we understand how serious our sin is. In a world that tends to encourage people to follow their own truth, make decisions based on what feels good, and excuse anything that might be considered sin, this is an important word. If the church is not on guard, we will fall into these same patterns.

- **What are some ways the patterns of the world might seep into the life of the church? Why must we be aware of this?**

Many have learned the hard way that sin’s consequences are serious. Unfortunately, people often must experience something for themselves instead of initially accepting the instruc-

tion or learning from others. When we grasp that God cares about our sin, it motivates us to stop excusing our sin and to fight against the cravings and inclinations of our flesh nature. For the church, the consequences of sin are not punishment but God's loving means of drawing us back to Him.

- **Application: What does this passage challenge you about in your own life?**

> Have someone in your group read Ezekiel 4:7-8.

Furthering the image, God used Ezekiel's arm to depict His own strong arm of judgment. God's judgment would be active and unrestrained. Think of passages you know where God warns of judgment and the people respond with repentance and making the necessary changes. Because He is merciful and forgiving, God often relents on His judgment. Sadly, this would not happen in response to Ezekiel's prophecy.

The verses that follow today's passage include details about the limitations God placed on sustenance for Ezekiel during the days of the prophetic display. This was to further illustrate the plight that was coming to Israel.

Those who witnessed Ezekiel's actions couldn't ignore the destruction of his physical appearance. Sin causes spiritual destruction and deterioration as we choose to allow it to reign in our hearts and lives. Think about all the consequences you experience physically, mentally, and spiritually when sin goes unchecked.

- **Why is it impossible to compartmentalize sins affect in our lives? How does this remind us that God's call for confession and repentance is out of love for us?**

Just as Ezekiel representatively took on the weight of the people's sin, Jesus took on the full weight of our sin. The picture of all that Ezekiel went through to carry out God's plan pointed forward to Christ's endurance in carrying out the plan of salvation for us. Again, we are reminded that sin has serious consequences, but Jesus has paid those consequences for all who trust in Him.

- **How do warnings of God's judgment serve to continually point us to the cross?**

Ezekiel's actions were meant as a warning for God's people. They still serve this purpose for us today. As Christ followers, we should continue to reflect on the high cost of our sin that sent Jesus to the cross. As we do, we are spurred on to continue the fight against sin, seeking to live holy lives before God as He has called us.

- **Application: How does Christ's payment for your sin motivate you to live every day for Him?**

APPLICATION

Using dramatic tactics through His prophet, Ezekiel, God painted a picture of what the Israelites faced. The Lord gave instructions to Ezekiel to depict what the Israelites would experience.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and that's exactly what was needed with Ezekiel so the exiles could witness his actions and be confronted by the consequences of their own sin. God has always taken sin seriously, and His people must realize that truth. Remembering the seriousness of sin and the high cost paid for our sin on the cross of Christ motivates us to live obedient and faithful lives each day.

- **What is your primary takeaway today regarding the seriousness of sin?**
- **How can we encourage one another to take sin seriously and support one another in the fight against it?**
- **Who can you share with about the kindness of God revealed in Jesus?**

PRAY

Thank the Lord for His grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Ask for recognition of any ways you have excused sin and allowed it to remain in your life. Seek a renewed commitment to repentance and a desire for nearness to the Lord.

Historical Context of Ezekiel

Purpose

The message of the book revolves around a pivotal event in the history of Israel—the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Prior to the announcement of Jerusalem’s fall, Ezekiel’s message was characterized by judgment. In his scathing review of Israelite history, Ezekiel exposed the nation’s moral depravity and absence of spiritual concern (2:1–8; 8:7–18; 13:1–23; 17:1–21; 20:1–32). After the destruction of Jerusalem was complete and the nation was in exile, his message changed. He turned to a proclamation of hope, which is what the people then needed most. God would provide a new heart and a new spirit to enable the people to be faithful and avoid a future judgment (11:17–20; 36:26–28). The Lord would establish a new temple (chaps. 40–48) and a new way of worship for the people once they were restored.

Author

There is sufficient reason for maintaining that the prophet Ezekiel composed the book of Ezekiel in Babylon. The work demonstrates such homogeneity and literary coherence that it is reasonable to conclude that all editorial work was carried out by a single person, the prophet himself.

The inclusion of historical dates at the beginning of many of the oracles and prophecies in Ezekiel is another important unifying factor. The book is one of the most chronologically ordered books of the Bible. Thirteen times a passage is introduced by an indication of time. The common point of orientation for the dates given in Ezekiel is the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah in 598/597 BC.

The occurrence of visions throughout the book (chaps. 1; 8–11; 40–48) is another strong argument in favor of its overall unity. Finally, stylistic features throughout the book strengthen the unity argument.

Setting

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, was among the approximately ten thousand citizens of Judah deported to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem in 598/597 BC (2Kg 24:10–17). His prophetic call came to him five years later (the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile), in 593 BC. He received his call at the age of thirty (1:1), the year he should have begun his duties as a priest (Nm 4:3). The last dated oracle in the book occurs in the twenty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin (29:17), thus indicating that Ezekiel’s ministry lasted twenty-two or twenty-three years. The prophet lived during one of the greatest crises in Israel’s history—the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, plus the exile of Judah’s leading citizens to Babylon.

Special Features

The book of Ezekiel contains the divinely inspired prophecies of the prophet of the same name. These prophecies consist of oracles in the first person, giving the reader a sense of access to Ezekiel’s private memoirs. Written primarily to the exiles in Babylon, the prophecies equally emphasize judgment of sins and the promise of hope and restoration.

EZEKIEL 4:1-8

4:1 Sketching a city plan on a clay brick was not an uncommon practice in the ancient world. Ezekiel was instructed to sketch the siege of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's construction of the siege wall around Jerusalem is described in 2Kg 25:1 and Jr 52:4.

Notes:

4:2 The purpose of a siege was to wear enemies down by halting their flow of food and supplies. Battering rams were pushed up siege ramps to attack the city walls.

4:3 The setting of God's face behind an iron plate indicated that he would no longer look favorably upon the people. The people would experience the covenant curses for their disobedience (Lv 26:17; Dt 31:17–18; 32:20). War (it is under siege), along with its repercussions, is included in the list of covenantal curses (Dt 28:52–57).

4:4–6 The iniquity of Israel was greater than that of Judah. One popular view accounting for the periods of 390 days or years and 40 days or years is to calculate the 390 years backward from 586 BC, placing the starting point for the period of Israel's iniquity in 976 BC, the year when the construction of the temple began. This would indicate that the nation was characterized by rebellion during the entire time the temple was standing. However, the best conclusion is that the 430-year period was chosen to represent the period of Israel's stay in Egypt. By depicting the total period of sin and judgment in terms of a renewed Egyptian bondage, the prophet invited the hope that the end of the appointed time of punishment would result in a new exodus and a new entry into the promised land. An ancient Jewish tradition noted that the number 390 derived from the Hebrew numerical value of ymy msr, the consonants of the phrase "the days of the siege" (see v. 8; 5:2).

4:7 His fist was probably clenched as well.

4:8 The siege that Ezekiel was predicting lasted two years (2Kg 25:1–8).¹