

# **Dr. Leslie Allen, Ezekiel, Lecture 3, Later Commission, Signs and Their Meaning for Jerusalem, Ezekiel 3:16-5:17**

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This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 3, a Later Commission, Signs and Their Meaning for Jerusalem. Ezekiel 3:16-5:17.

We come to our third lecture, and we're moving on from 3:16, and we'll carry on until the end of chapter 15.

Let me say, in case I forget to say it at the end, that the next lecture will concern chapters 6 and 7. Let's begin by looking down to verse 22, and you'll see there's a reason why I want to come back in a moment to the earlier verses. From verse 22, the pattern of 1:1 through 3:15 is followed. There's a divine, another divine vision in 20 verses 20 through 24a, and then there's a divine speech which runs from the second half of verse 24 down to 5:17. And so there's parallelism there in that pattern.

That pattern is broken in 3:3 through 21. These verses aren't 3:3 to 21; they're 3:16 through 21. This speaks of Ezekiel being appointed to be a watchman to the exiles.

And, in fact, it's a fresh commission. And it seems to me a quite different commission from what he's had before. And I will go on to try and explain.

In 3:16 through 21, Ezekiel is given the role of a sentry on guard, warning if something troubling comes near. He is to warn the exiles that this is so. Hopefully, they will listen and avoid the trouble.

This sounds very different from his earlier commission as a prophet of judgment, whether they listen or not. Anyway, we must say something again about the book's structure. We spoke about it briefly in our first lecture: At first sight, there's a chronological smooth movement indicated by date.

We start in 593 and steadily move on through the book. This will be illustrated in chapter 8 and in verse 1. In the 6th year, in the 6th month, on the 5th day of the month, a new message came. And that is now in the second part of the book of Ezekiel.

And it's a development from chapter 1 and verse 2. On the 5th day of the month, it was the 5th year. And so, we're steadily moving on. And that's the impression that we're being given.

Halfway through, we come to the climactic dating of 587, or the time when the news of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 occurred. And on we go from there with a new message of salvation. And this seems to be a very valid way of looking at the book.

Indeed, it seems to me to reflect the first edition of the book. But then we also find a variation—in fact, a series of variations—that it's not as simple as that.

There seems to be a second edition that wants to take a different line. And we encounter it first. As I said in the first lecture, in chapter 29, there's a message against Egypt. The next message suddenly flashes forward to 571, which is even later than the last date in chapter 40 of 573. And so, in that later oracle against Egypt, we find a thematic theme that there's this jumping forward.

And another oracle against Egypt is cited there alongside the old one. But we've moved forward. We're on a different time length.

We're told quite clearly in chapter 21, verse 17. Now, there's an indication of a thematic approach. And I think this is what's happening here: we have the same theme: the commissioning of Ezekiel, he's given a fresh commission by God.

But I think that this actually applies to the latter half of his ministry. And it goes along with the messages of salvation, which followed 5.8.7. And if so, then we've got to think very carefully. But I think further, and we shall have to wait until we come to other chapters in the book, that there are other instances in the first half of the book where we're not pre-587. After all, we're post 5.8.7. And so there seems to be a second edition, where later material has been moved chronologically, and later material has been moved forward in the book.

This seems to be what's happening. And so alongside the first edition of vaguely two halves chronologically, we have this other way of looking at things, which takes more of a thematic line, not only in that oracle against Egypt, matching a much earlier oracle against Egypt and set alongside it. But also, I think in this later commission, we shall see that this Watchmen commission is a very different kettle of fish from the first commission as a prophet of absolute judgment, radical judgment, and no option.

It had to come. And we should see an element of choice now that's given to the exiles. So, this belongs more to the Salvation Period and to the responsibility that the exiles of 587 including the 597 ones had as they accepted a message of salvation, but alongside it, they were given the responsibility to live up to it and to live in accord even now before that salvation actually occurs.

There's a return to the land and the glorious time that's going to follow. So, in that case, what happened is that when we come to 3:16, we have it at the end of seven

days, right? Well, that picks up 3:15, doesn't it? I sat there among them, stunned for seven days, and he needed that time to recover from the shock of the vision and the commission. But at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me.

Okay, you get the impression that we're flowing smoothly on. This was the next thing that happened. But then look at verse 22.

Then the hand of the Lord was upon me there. Where? Well, verse 22 is actually referring back to verse 15. And it looked like a continuation of verse 15.

Because I came to the exiles in Tel-Abib who lived by the river Chebar. I sat there among them, stunned for seven days. In verse 22, the hand of the Lord was upon me there.

And he said, rise up, go out into the valley. And there we are. So, 22 gives the impression of following on from verse 15.

And if I'm right, that at the end of seven days, at the beginning of 16, originally was a preface to verse 22. At the end of seven days, then the hand of the Lord was upon me there, and it carries on. But the word of the Lord came to me, and this sentinel commission that follows has been slipped in.

And it really is a sort of a literary intrusion, but a deliberate one. A deliberate one. Following on from the theme of Ezekiel's commissioning, let's think of another commission that Ezekiel had.

But we shall see it's a different commission and one which really comes into effect after Jerusalem had fallen. Now, why should I say that? Well, I can tell you something that's true, but you don't know yet. In chapter 33, we have a longer account of Ezekiel's commissioning as a watchman, or sentinel, or sentry.

And what we've got here, in verses 17 following, is an extract from verses 7 to 9 of chapter 33. And they are repeated here. And that's very significant for a start because when we come to 33, we've gone over that hump, and we seem to be beyond the successful siege of Jerusalem, the fall of Jerusalem.

And we're in a different time frame now. So that is very interesting, and that's a backup for what I'm saying. This watchman theme is very interesting because there was an earlier prophet, not very much earlier, but earlier, Jeremiah.

There's mention of a watchman theme in Jeremiah, and it's describing earlier prophets. In Jeremiah 6:17, I raised up sentinels for you, give heed to the sound of the trumpet, but they said we will not give heed. In fact, this account of the commissioning that we have here, in a shortened form in chapter 3 and in the full

long form in chapter 33, it's very much a development of 6:17, and I wouldn't be surprised if before 597, before Ezekiel was exiled to Babylonia, there in the temple on duty, he'd had occasion to stand in the temple courts and listen to Jeremiah preaching, and bringing up this sentinel theme, this watchman theme.

This is what's developed here in a longer way and applied more fully to the second work of Ezekiel. This sentinel theme very much has the interests of the people of God at heart. The basic thesis is that trouble can be avoided, and there's a warning to the people, and hopefully, they will listen.

Hopefully, they will listen. And so, a different wavelength from that earlier commissioning as a prophet of absolute, inevitable judgment, whether they listen or not. And we find two little themes that are brought out here.

That first of all, Ezekiel has a responsibility to act as a watchman, and to warn of trouble ahead, so that Israel can take precautions and avoid. Mortals, I've made you a sentinel for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

If I say to the wicked, you shall surely die, and you give them no warning or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way, in order to save their life, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity. So, there was a choice. The people could live, or they could die.

First of all, Ezekiel has a responsibility. It's up to you, Ezekiel. Make sure you pass on this message, or else I'll hold you accountable.

I'll hold you accountable. If you don't pass on that message, it's going to be your fault. Because verse 18 says, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity, not having heard the warning, but their blood I will require at your hand.

So that's a very heavy responsibility. But then there's a responsibility upon the hearers. Are they going to listen or not? They'd better listen, or else they'll suffer for it.

But if you warn the wicked, and they do not turn from their wickedness, or from their wicked way, they shall die for their iniquity, but you will have saved your life. You'll be spared. You've done your bit.

They didn't do their bit. And so, we see what a contrast this is. And this is the beginning of a new type of message that has got a sort of sting in the tail to it.

In the first half of Ezekiel, interspersed among those utter judgment chapters, you get these salvation oracles with a sting attached to them. And the responsibility of

living up to what God says. Later on, I shall distinguish between judgment with a capital J and judgment with a small j. And that first commission to Jeremiah spoke of judgment with a capital J. But still, after 587, there was still a need for the message of a judgment with a small case j. And individuals, we're not talking now about absolute full destruction and so on, full judgment, which cannot be avoided.

But we're talking about groups of people or individuals among the people of God who could be in trouble if they depart from God's ways. There's still trouble for them. And so, this warning has to be given.

So, though Ezekiel is a messenger of salvation, there's still a bit of judgment involved. And we shall go on to see later, much later, that the New Testament knows about this. And there's still judgment with a little j involved where the Christian is concerned.

But here we are. This is Ezekiel's warning. And the warning is that God's got to take reprisal if there are individuals there who persist in following their own wicked ways, then OK, there's trouble for them.

There's trouble for them. But if Ezekiel warns them, oh, I'm sorry, and they repent, then that is wonderful. And there's that opportunity.

And you've got this great saying that the intention is to save their life in verse 18. You give them a warning; they heed the warning, and they repent. Oh, right, they're going to live.

And this introduces us to a very important word in the salvation oracles of Ezekiel, the word life, the noun life, and the verb live. It is so important and it takes on a whole fullness of meaning in Jeremiah's oracles of salvation. Over against the virtual death of exile, there's the promise of life back in the land.

And they can anticipate that life even now. And so, it's part of the message of salvation. In fact, if you turn to chapter 33 and verse 11, a verse that isn't extracted and put back in chapter 3, then you will find that there's a statement that God does have the exile's interest at heart.

As I live, says the Lord God, this is 33:11, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways. Why will you die? And there it is.

That's the full message. And so, it's God's grace that this warning is given. So he doesn't have to punish them.

He doesn't have to bring this judgment with a small J upon individuals or groups of wicked people among the exiles. And so that's a very crucial verse that underlies and governs this watchman commission here. God's ultimate will is to give newness of life to those who turn from their bad lifestyle.

But the salvation is not given unconditionally. There's this obligation for the people of God, the exiles. Exiles still, but looking forward to the newness of life and even anticipating that life even now.

But those who persist in that bad lifestyle, they deserve God's punishment. But that life depends on repentance and good living. There's a fascinating New Testament reference that scholars think depends very much on chapter 3 and chapter 33 and that watchman theme.

It's in the book of Hebrews at the end of chapter 13 and verse 17. And listen to what the writer to the Hebrews says. And notice how close it is to the watchman commission that Ezekiel received.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, and they will give an account. Just as Ezekiel had to give an account of what was responsible, these leaders would have to give an account as they kept watch over the souls of the congregation. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing, for that would be harmful for you.

That if people, Christians, persist in their sin, then all harm is going to befall them. And so, you've got judgment with a little J, and you've got the leaders accountable, and you've got the leaders commissioned to be watchmen over the congregation. And scholars firmly believe that this is an echo, in fact, of material that we've got in Ezekiel 3 and 33.

And in fact, one can say that the writer to the Hebrews took those verses very much to heart. Because with all those warning passages, he's very much living out the watchman commission of Ezekiel. But he's performing it in the context of those who profess Christ and are part of the church evidently.

And so what this means is that in chapter 3, this watchman theme breaks in chronologically. And earlier in chapter 3, there was a message for the 597 exiles, that message of absolute judgment. Jerusalem is going to fall before long.

In 593, Ezekiel is also already told to say something that will happen in 587: the destruction of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem. And so that fits in very nicely with this initial message of absolute judgment. But then 3:16-21 comes to the 587 exiles, that more general group who came not in 597, the VIPs of Jerusalem, but the general populace who came in 587.

And this is the message that's given to them. And as we go through in the first half of the book, we will find slipped in these messages to that later group. And the reason, I think, is, why should that have been done? Why couldn't it have been kept for the second half? Because the book as a whole is eventually meant to be read by both groups of exiles, as well as by the second and first groups.

And there's an opportunity taken in the first half of the book to speak directly to the second group. Because you can go a long way in the first half of Ezekiel, and you can just say, well, yes, this was a message for the 597 exiles, wasn't it? And it's happened now, all that stuff about Jerusalem falling, it has, and that old stuff. Okay, we listen to it and try to learn from it.

But it doesn't directly relate to us. And the interest of that second band of exiles is caught. Because every now and again, we have a direct appeal to them.

This is for you. This is for you. So, listen to the pure judgment stuff, and then listen to the partial judgment stuff, which directly appeals to you.

And so there seems to be a deliberate mixture there. Okay. Well, that complicates matters.

But there it is. That seems to be the intention there. And so we've seen that earlier in chapter 3 and 1 and 2, there's a sort of a take it or leave it attitude.

But now, in this little section here, it's different. If they listen, one consequence. If they don't listen, there's another consequence.

There's a choice. If the people disregard the prophet's warnings, too bad for them. But there is a choice.

And there's a choice for the first time. All right. 3:22 picks up from the first part of the chapter and moves along from there.

And it repeats that adverb there from 3:15. And that seven days, I suggest, at the beginning of 16 also relates to verse 22. And that was what it did before the deliberate interruption of the second half of 16 down to verse 21.

We move on to a new series of messages from 3:22 onwards and to the end of Chapter 5. And these are a series of symbolic acts that Ezekiel is told to perform. In fact, there are five in all. A series of five symbolic actions which have been grouped together in the text from 3:22 onwards.

And God orders the prophet to carry out these symbolic actions. And in each case, he gives an interpretation. As we said in our first lecture, this is a show-and-tell way of prophesying that Ezekiel is told to take over.

One of these is also found in earlier classical prophets but quite developed in the book of Ezekiel. Actions speak louder than words, we say. But here in Ezekiel, we find a combination of actions and words.

The combination speaks very loudly indeed. Of course, this show-and-tell also passes in a slightly different way into the New Testament and into the Christian Church because we also have our precious symbolic actions, our ritualized ones, the sacraments of baptism and communion.

And these really go back to the symbolic actions of the prophets, which are accompanied by an interpretation. And so, also for the Church, there's a sort of a show-and-tell. And we, in our case, do certain things.

And we're given an interpretation of what we're doing. And in this case, the prophet is doing certain things. And we shall see what these five different things are.

But first of all, as in 1:3, at the beginning in verse 22 through 24, we have a little vision. Not a long vision now, but a little vision of God once more. Rise up, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you.

So, I rose up and went out into the valley, and the glory of the Lord stood there like the glory that I had seen by the river Kibar. And I fell on my face, and then the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me and said to me. And there we have it, this vision within an accompanying message.

The vision shows that it's truly from God. And then, too, we have mentioned the hand of the Lord. Perhaps, no, we don't in this case.

Oh, yes, we do, at the very beginning in 22. The hand of the Lord was upon me there. Yes.

And so this is this signal. Here it comes, something important. Pay attention.

Oh, that hurt. Yes. I got your attention, haven't I? This sort of slap on the head that God gives him is a sort of introductory notice that something's going to happen.

And very often a vision as it is here. And so, there's this brief description of another theophany and Ezekiel's shock submission and then empowerment to stand by this Spirit. This Spirit empowers him.



Then, the prophet is told to go home and stay in seclusion from the people. And that's very strange because you expect Ezekiel to be told, oh, here's the first message of judgment you've got to pass on. But no, go home and do nothing.

That is quite strange. And Ezekiel must have been very, found it very unexpected because he thought he'd get a message to pass on. But he doesn't.

Go home and stay home, and don't prophesy anything. And we ask, well, why should this happen? And presumably this is to symbolize God's alienation from his people. Really, strictly, there's nothing to say.

There's nothing to say. They're so alienated, the two of them. The people of God have left behind God's will, set out in God's covenant standards, and there's a great gulf fixed between them.

And so that seclusion and that silence, it really embodies that great gap between the two. And he is to be silent. And verse 24, go shut yourself inside your house, as for you mortal, cords shall be placed on you, and so you shall be bound with them so that you cannot go out among the people, even if you wanted to.

Perhaps there's something I can say to them that I ought to say, no, you're going to be tied up, and you're going to be under house arrest, as it were, and you won't go out among the people at all. And then, even more, I'm going to make it physically impossible for you to speak. You're going to be struck dumb, so it can't be enforced more that Ezekiel's not to say anything.

In verse 26, I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so you shall be speechless and unable to reprove them. And all that is very striking. And it's because they're a rebellious house, and this gap between them, really, there's nothing to say.

And this seems to have gone on, but in verse 27, there's a promise that he is going to be given messages at some point. When I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, thus says the Lord God. There's that magic messenger formula again.

And that when means whenever. Whenever I speak with you and give you a message, then you can pass it on. But it won't be very often.

Don't think it'll be very often. And this seems to have continued up to 587, that now and then Ezekiel was given messages, but the rest of the time he stayed home, and he was dumb, whether literally dumb or whether it was a psychological thing. I don't know that he felt he had to be speechless, but there it was.

But then we come to Ezekiel 24 and verse 27, where that ban of just intermittent speaking amid this dumbness is lifted. Ezekiel 24 and verse 27, and now we come to 587. On that day, when the news comes of the fall of Jerusalem, your mouth shall be opened to the one who has escaped and brought the news, and you shall speak and no longer be silent.

So, there's this very striking symbolic action, which is inaction, which in itself speaks volumes, doesn't it? So, there it is. So, whenever I speak with you, then you can speak, but there'd be just this intermittent speaking at my command, and otherwise, I've got nothing to say to them, and you've got nothing to say to them, these exiles. But then we have the second symbolic action, and we move on to chapter 4. And this is quite involved.

Ezekiel is to sort of play at something, and he's to take a brick, he's to take an ordinary clay brick, and he has to draw a city on it, and that city is Jerusalem. And he's to take that brick, and this is obviously a time when he's told to say something. And in this symbolic action, he takes that brick, and he's got people around, and they, oh, what's that? Oh, that's a city.

And they perhaps, oh yes, well, okay, Jerusalem. And then he's to make little models of siege works, the sort of instruments and so on in warfare that would be used for a siege. And he was to place these little models around this brick.

And then, of course, it would dawn on the watchers, oh, this is the siege of Jerusalem. This is the siege of Jerusalem. So that's what it's talking about here.

But then he's to bring an iron plate, and it was the sort of plate that would be put on the fire, and you put the food on top of the fire, and the food would be cooked, but it wouldn't be burnt. It wouldn't have direct contact with the flames. And so, he was to borrow from his wife's kitchen, I expect, this iron plate, and he was to set it up in the ground so it was a barrier.

And on the other side was the brick with the models of siege warfare around it, and then there was this iron plate, and then there was Ezekiel on the other side. And, of course, Ezekiel is the representative of God, and it's saying there's an iron curtain going to fall between Jerusalem and me, and Jerusalem is going to be besieged, and I'm not going to help it. God's not going to help it.

So, Ezekiel is God's representative in this symbolic action. So, that's very involved. That's the most involved of all the symbolic actions, and it must have taken a lot of time and energy to get these things together and to sort it out.

And so, there's this iron curtain between God and Jerusalem in this coming siege of Jerusalem. This is the message to the exiles of 597 who were longing to go home and

fully thought that God was on their side and would take them home very soon. But no, things were going to get worse, and there was going to be a full and final siege of Jerusalem.

And so, over against the hopes of the exiles that they would soon return home, this symbolic action is saying, no, it's not going to happen. And so, this is a sign for the house of Israel, it says at the end of verse 3. And you remember John's gospel, when it speaks of the miracles of Jesus, it speaks of signs which point to who Jesus is. Well, here, this is a sign, and it isn't explained.

There's no interpretation given to it because it's self-explanatory. You've got the artwork of the models and the drawing on the brick, and you've got the iron plate, and there it is. But then, in verse 4, there's the third sign, the third symbolic action, the third of the five.

And this is a sort of charade that Ezekiel takes part in. And really, it continues from the former symbolic action, because it's still there. The brick's still there, the models are still there, the iron plate is still there, fixed in the ground upright, presumably.

But now, you've got to do something else, Ezekiel. And he's got to lie on his left side. And there he is.

And he's got to do it for 390 days. Well, I'm glad it doesn't say 390 nights because when the sunset, he could get up and go home, presumably, and then turn up on duty the next morning and lie down on his left side for another day and then go home. And on and on and on it went this remarkable sign.

390 days. And then, after that, when he'd done that for that long time, over a year, he was to turn around, he was to lie on his right side for 40 days. And there it is.

So, he had this performance to carry out. And one thing it says in this lying down, it says in verse 7, it says, with your arm bared you shall prophesy against it. And it was to pull back his sleeve, and it was to hold out his arm like that.

And that represents the hostility of God. The hostility of God. And there it is.

That's another part of this dynamic action. So, what's going on there? There are 490 days, and there are 40 days. And if you compare the new RSV with the NIV, you will see there's a difference.

And I think the NRSV is half right and the NIV is half right. Well, what does the NRSV say for a start? It says, lie on your left side and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it. This lying on the left side represents the punishment of the house of Israel.

This is the punishment for Judah, including the exiles. You shall bear their punishment for the number of the days you lie there. For I assign you a number of days equal to the number of the years of their punishment.

And so, you shall bear the punishment of the house of Israel. Well, that's the left side meaning, in terms of punishment, according to the NRSV. But then in verse 6, once again, you lie on your right side, and once more, you bear the punishment of the house of Judah.

Forty days I assign you, one day for each year. So, it's punishment in both cases. If you look at the NIV, oh no, it's not punishment. It's sin.

It's sin, it's sin. On the left side, he's bearing the sin, and he's representing the sin of Judah. And on the right side, he's bearing the sin of Judah.

And you might say, well, how can you have two completely different translations like that? Well, the one word in Hebrew, sometimes in Hebrew, a word can mean itself and a consequence of itself. And so, this one word can mean sin or punishment, but according to the context. And so, the NRSV goes down one translation road, the NIV the other translation road.

I think half of it is wrong in both translations. And in the first half, you shall bear the sin of the house of Israel on the left side for 390 days. And that 390 days, it represents the time going back to Solomon's temple, all those years.

Remember, we were told they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day, a long history of sinning against God. And that's what this symbolic action represents. It's bearing the sin, representing that sin.

But then, but then that punishment, that sin or punishment, when there's a turning down on the right side, lying on the right side, those 40 days, I think there, there it is punishment, there it is punishment. And it's the punishment of being sent into exile. And exile is being represented here as 40 years.

And so, in the symbolic action, 40 days. And so, representing the sin of the people over that long period, and then the punishment of the people there to be sent into exile for that shorter period. And I think that makes sense.

So, the NRSV is half right, and the NIV is half right. But I think we've got to mediate between them. Okay, well, that's the third sign.

And now the fourth sign in verses 9 to 17. And it's still related to the siege of Jerusalem, but we don't find mention of the models in the brick anymore. And we don't necessarily assume that they were there, but they may have been there.

So, it may be a direct continuation. And verse 9 seems to suggest that. It just sort of moves along, doesn't it? You take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt, put them into one vessel, and make bread for yourself.

He's got to do his wife's job and make some bread. But normally, the implication is you'd make bread from a certain grain. And you have a certain amount of wheat, and you'd make a wheat loaf.

And you take millet, and you'd make a millet loaf. But the point is that this is a representation of what it's going to be like in Jerusalem, where food is so scarce, and you've just got scraps of grain, odds, and ends here and there that you've got to gather together, and make this sort of mixed, all sorts of the loaf. I think in the supermarket today you can buy a loaf of bread, which if I remember right is called Ezekiel 4:9. And it's a mixture of different grains.

And it's presented as if it's something good. But in this context, it's something bad. Just these odds and ends put together because there's nothing else.

You can't make a wheat loaf. You've just got to get together enough seeds and grains, so you've got a single loaf. And he's told he's to eat this loaf of bread, make a loaf of bread every day to make a new loaf and eat it.

And we're told what the weight of that bread is in verse 10. It's 20 shekels. And between you and me, that works out as 8 ounces.

So, he's to eat an 8-ounce loaf a day. If you compare it with a modern loaf that I buy, that's normally 20 ounces. And so of that size loaf, it would be five and a half slices of bread, the sole food for all day.

Five and a half slices of bread and nothing more, no other food. And this is an indication of the scarcity of food in the coming siege. And then he's to drink a small amount of water.

And we're told what the water is, one-sixth of a hen. And that works out as two-thirds of a quart. And a quart is two pints, so it's just over a pint of water to have all day.

And under the burning hot sun, you really need more than just over a pint of water a day. And there it is. But the cisterns will have dried up in Jerusalem and there's no more water, no more water.

So, this is scarcity of food and water, which is being represented. And then, in verse 12, Ezekiel says, no, I'm not going to do that. What's he told to do? And you shall eat it as a barley cake, the bread, you shall eat as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.

Now, this refers to the fact that normally, for fuel, apart from wood and such combustible things, you would dry dung, sheep, and cow dung, and you would have a supply for use on the fire. And by then there'd be no smell and so it wouldn't be too bad. And so that's normally how one would cook in ancient times, on dried animal dung as the fuel.

But the implication is, in the siege, the animals have all been killed for food. No more animals. Right, use human dung, dry that.

And Ezekiel says, no, I'm not going to do that. That is too bad. And if you ask why, the reason is he's speaking as a priest, and human dung is unclean.

So as a priest he cannot do it. His priestly training says no. And so, it's not just an emotional reaction such as we might have.

It's a sort of a priestly compulsion, priestly instinct, and I'm not going to do that. And God says, all right, I see how upset you are. And he makes a concession.

All right, you can have cow's dung, which is fully available here in Babylonia. And instead of human dung on which you may prepare your bread. I'm going to spoil the symbolism a little bit, but okay, you can do that.

So that was very nice of God, the grace of God, that he let Ezekiel off. Ezekiel will have a heart attack, I think, if he tried to carry on. And then there's this little commentary here, verse 16.

Mortal, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness. They shall drink water by measure and in dismay.

Wondering whether there's going to be another drink tomorrow and another meal tomorrow. Because everything will be so scarce, and that staff of bread, that's a metaphor.

It's bread which is the staff of life. Bread which is the support for life. NIV just renders the food supply instead of the staff of bread.

And then the fifth and final sign in chapter 5. He used to take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor and run it over your head and your beard. He used to cut off his

hair on his head and his facial hair. And this is something ominous because you did that as part of the ritual of mourning.

And so, there's a very sort of negative feel about this from the very start, irrespective of how it's going to be interpreted. But once again, it is siege-related. Because he's to a third, one-third of the hair, verse 2 of chapter 5. You shall burn in the fire inside the city.

And that city, that's the brick where the city has been drawn, a picture of the city has been drawn. And he's to divide that hair into three parts. One part is to be put on the brick, and it is going to be set on fire, too.

And so, this is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of human life during that siege of Jerusalem. And that when the Babylonians breakthrough and set everywhere on fire, people get killed as they are in the California forest fires inside their homes. And there's a second pile, and that's to be spread around the brick.

So, we're still in the context of this siege of Jerusalem. And it's to be slashed with the sword, slash it, those bits of hair. And this indicates the execution of the citizens of Jerusalem as a result of the siege.

And the third pile was to be thrown up into the air. And this is an indication of going away in that forced migration into the siege. And the sword is going to be slashing it as it goes into the air.

And so, some of those who go into exile are going to be killed. And then just a few hairs from that third pile is to be spared. But even some of these would be taken and put on the fire on the brick representing Jerusalem.

Then, from 5 to 17, we get a long explanation of this fifth symbolic action. And it spells out the reason why Jerusalem had to fall. And we come back to this sort of rebellion.

Jerusalem, I've set at the center of the nations, but she's rebelled against my ordinances. And there's an echo of that Zion tradition. The song of Zion in the Psalms is The City of God.

I've set Jerusalem in the center, the very center of the nations with the other nations around her. And so, it's the center of my attention. But over against that, Jerusalem has rebelled against my ordinances.

In chapters 2 and chapter 3, we had the words rebel and rebellion and rebellious over and over again. And so, this is being picked up from there now. And Jerusalem had been the focus of God's attention, but that privilege is to be withdrawn.

And the reason is carefully explained. And this was a lesson that the prisoners of war of 597, they had to learn. Later, the 587 exiles had to remember that history of rebellion, a long rebellion, which eventually would catch up with Jerusalem so that it would be destroyed.

In verse 13, we have a reference to anger. My anger shall spend itself. I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself.

And a great emphasis upon anger. And we can just briefly refer to a New Testament parallel. When the letter to the Romans is setting out the gospel, the good news, it has to start with bad news.

The wrath of God, the anger of God, represented falling upon the world. And that bad news has to be listened to before the good news of the gospel can be heard. In the New Testament version, the judgment comes.

But God absorbs the judgment himself. But that's the only reason. It's through that absorbing of the judgment of the cross of Jesus that there can be good news.

But once again, there has to be bad news and the awareness of bad news and the anger, the wrath of God before ever there can be good news. And in a way, in a different way, the book of Ezekiel is all about this. Judgment first and then salvation.

Bad news before the good news. If we had time, but you can trace it yourself, we have a great judgment oracle in that interpretation in chapter 5. Typically, a judgment oracle is made up first of accusation and then punishment. And the punishment consists of two kinds.

One, God is to intervene personally. I'm going to do something. I'm going to do something, says the judgment.

And then you have human consequences that follow. The result will be tragedy and disaster and loss and ruin among the human population. And this is the pattern.

We have three different phases put together. There's a triple judgment oracle in that interpretation in chapter 5:5 to 17. It's all variations, slight variations, that pick up this pattern and repeat it in three ways.

And so, there's that unpacking in terms of a form of an oracle of judgment that we have in a very lengthy form in 5 through 17. So next time, chapters 6 and 7 will be our topic.



This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 3, a Later Commission, Signs and Their Meaning for Jerusalem. Ezekiel 3:16-5:17.