

# **The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide**

## **Lesson 2: The Siege of Jerusalem Acted Out**

**Ezekiel 4:1-5:17**

### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

This lesson confronts the class with the certainty and justice of God's judgment on sin, a theme our comfortable age would rather avoid. The doctrinal stakes are the holiness and justice of God. Help the class see that the sign-acts of chapters four and five are not the eccentric behavior of a strange prophet but God-given enacted prophecies, each one declaring that the coming siege and fall of Jerusalem are certain because they are just. The brick, the iron pan, the days counted on Ezekiel's side, the famine rations, and the shaved and divided hair together hammer one message: God's word of judgment will come to pass, and it will fall because of real, persistent, defiant sin. Guard the class against two errors: a sentimental view of God that cannot imagine Him judging anyone, and a despairing view that misses the mercy threaded through these warnings.

The lesson also presses the doctrine of accountability. God specifically charges that Jerusalem rebelled against His statutes more wickedly than the surrounding nations, having been set in their midst to display His glory and having received His law. Greater light brings greater responsibility (Luke 12:48; Amos 3:2). This is sobering for any class that has long known the truth. Apply it gently but plainly: those who have heard much of God's word will answer for what they have done with it. Hold this together with Ezekiel 18:20, that each person bears the guilt of his own sin, not inherited guilt, so the class understands judgment as the just response to personal, willful rebellion.

Finally, lift the class's eyes from judgment to the cross. The same holiness and justice that required Jerusalem's judgment is the holiness and justice that required the death of Christ. At Calvary, Jesus bore the judgment our sin deserved (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8-9). Let the weight of these chapters deepen the class's gratitude for the gospel and their urgency to warn others in love. Aim to leave each student with a sober reverence for God's holiness, a renewed seriousness about sin, and a fresh wonder at the mercy that bore our judgment in our place.

### **Question 1**

#### **Student Question:**

*Ezekiel was commanded to act out the siege of Jerusalem with a brick, an iron pan, and his own body. What do these sign-acts reveal about the certainty of God's judgment and the seriousness with which He regards sin?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

God's first command to Ezekiel is to take a clay brick, the common building material of Babylon, and engrave on it the city of Jerusalem. Then he is to lay siege against it, building a fort, casting a mound, setting camps and battering rams around it. The prophet becomes a one-man army surrounding a clay-tablet city, acting out in miniature the catastrophe about to engulf the real Jerusalem.

This is enacted prophecy, a message delivered not in speech but in vivid, dramatic action. The point is unmistakable: the siege is going to happen. It is not a possibility to be debated or a threat that might be averted by wishful thinking. By acting it out before the people's eyes, God declares the certainty of what is coming. His word of judgment will surely come to pass.

We must not miss how seriously God takes sin. He does not shrug at the rebellion of His people. He does not look the other way. The elaborate care of the sign-act, the detail of forts and ramps and battering rams, reflects the deliberate certainty of the judgment. What God says He will do, He does.

For our class this confronts the casual assumption that warnings about sin are exaggerations, that the consequences will never really arrive. Ezekiel's brick says otherwise. The God who governs all things has declared that sin brings judgment, and He acts out that certainty so plainly that no honest observer could mistake it.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's word of judgment is certain; what He declares will surely come to pass.
- God takes sin with deadly seriousness and does not shrug it off.
- Enacted prophecy made the certainty of judgment impossible to ignore.
- Warnings about the consequences of sin are not exaggerations to be dismissed (Galatians 6:7).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why do you think God told Ezekiel to act out the siege rather than simply announce it?
- How does the certainty of this sign-act confront our tendency to take sin lightly?
- Where are you tempted to assume that the consequences of sin will never really come?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*God used dramatic, embodied warnings because words alone were being ignored. Where might God be using more than words, perhaps circumstances or consequences, to get your attention about something in your life?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

After drawing the besieged city, Ezekiel is told to take an iron pan, or griddle, and set it as an iron wall between himself and the city, and to set his face against it. The pan stands as a barrier of iron, a sign of the relentless, unyielding firmness of the siege, and a picture of God Himself setting His face against the city.

This is a sobering image. We are comfortable speaking of God's love, and rightly so, but Scripture also speaks plainly of God setting His face against persistent, unrepentant sin. The iron wall says that God's opposition to entrenched rebellion is firm and immovable. He is not indifferent to wickedness; He is actively set against it.

It is dangerous to imagine a God so soft that He never opposes anything. The same holiness that makes God lovely makes Him the enemy of all that destroys His people and dishonors His name. To presume on His patience, to treat His warnings as empty, is to set ourselves against the iron wall of His holy character.

Yet even here mercy is implied. God reveals His opposition so that His people might turn before the iron wall of judgment falls. He does not hide His face in secret and strike without warning. He sets the iron pan in plain view, calling them to repent while there is still time.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- A holy God genuinely opposes persistent, unrepentant sin.
- God's love does not cancel His firm opposition to entrenched rebellion.
- To presume on God's patience is to set ourselves against His holy character (Romans 2:4-5).
- God reveals His opposition openly so that sinners may repent before judgment falls.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is it dangerous to imagine a God who never opposes anything?
- How does the image of the iron wall balance our understanding of God's love?
- What warning is God setting plainly before you that calls you to turn while there is time?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*The iron pan set between Ezekiel and the city pictured God setting His face against Jerusalem. What does this image teach us about the reality that a holy God genuinely opposes persistent, unrepentant sin?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

God then commands Ezekiel to lie on his left side a set number of days, bearing the iniquity of the house of Israel, and then on his right side to bear the iniquity of the house of Judah, a day appointed for each year of their guilt. For a long stretch of time, the prophet lies bound, carrying in his own body the symbolic weight of the people's sin.

This is a striking picture of the prophet identifying with the people he warns. Ezekiel does not stand aloof, pronouncing judgment from a safe distance. He takes the burden of their iniquity onto himself, lying day after day in discomfort as a living testimony to the weight of their rebellion and the years of accumulated guilt that God has carefully counted.

There is a tender lesson here for those who would warn others. The faithful watchman does not announce judgment with cold detachment or secret satisfaction. He bears the burden, he feels the weight, he carries the people in his heart even as he tells them the hard truth. Warning and love are not opposites; the truest warnings flow from a heart that aches for those in danger.

Ultimately this points beyond Ezekiel to the One who did not merely symbolically bear iniquity but actually carried it. Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Let Ezekiel's days on his side stir the class to intercede for and warn the lost, not from above them, but from alongside them, with hearts that carry their burden to God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The faithful watchman warns from alongside people, bearing their burden, not from cold detachment.
- God carefully counts the years of accumulated sin; rebellion is not overlooked.
- Warning others in love and carrying them in our hearts belong together.
- Ezekiel's symbolic burden-bearing points to Christ, who actually bore our sins (1 Peter 2:24).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean to warn others from alongside them rather than from above them?
- Who in your life is in spiritual danger that you could carry to God in prayer this week?
- How does Ezekiel bearing iniquity point us forward to Christ bearing ours?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Ezekiel bore the iniquity of the people by lying on his side for many days. How does this picture of bearing the weight of others' sin stir you to intercede for and warn those around you who are in danger?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

While lying on his side, Ezekiel is told to prepare and eat carefully weighed-out food and rationed water, eating it day by day from time to time. The bread is a meager mixture, the portions are tiny, and the message is famine. During the coming siege of Jerusalem, food and water will be so scarce that people will eat by weight and drink by measure, wasting away in want and dismay.

Then comes one of the most jarring details. God first commands the bread to be baked over human dung, a defilement that would horrify any Israelite. When Ezekiel protests that he has never defiled himself, God relents and permits cow dung instead. The point of the defiled fuel is that the people will eat their bread unclean among the nations, stripped of the purity and provision they once knew.

The picture is of sin's bitter harvest. The very people who feasted in rebellion will know scarcity and defilement. Sin always overpromises and underdelivers. It dangles satisfaction and abundance, then leaves its servants hungry, empty, and ashamed. The famine rations are a parable of what rebellion against God finally yields.

Help the class connect this to their own experience. Sin presents itself as the path to fullness, but it is a liar. The pleasures it promises turn to ashes; the freedom it offers becomes bondage. God lets Ezekiel act out the emptiness so that His people might see, before it is too late, where the road of rebellion actually leads.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Sin overpromises satisfaction and delivers emptiness, scarcity, and shame.
- The famine rations dramatize the bitter harvest that rebellion against God yields (Galatians 6:8).
- God's judgments expose the lie that sin can give lasting fullness.
- Seeing where sin truly leads is meant to drive us to repentance before it is too late.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When have you seen sin promise satisfaction but deliver only emptiness?
- Why is sin so often described as a liar in the way it presents itself?
- How can honestly facing where sin leads help us turn from it?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*God explained that Jerusalem was judged because she rebelled against His ways more wickedly than the nations around her, having received greater light. What does this teach us about the greater accountability that comes with greater knowledge of God's truth?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Chapter five brings the climactic sign-act. Ezekiel is commanded to take a sharp sword, use it as a barber's razor, and shave his head and his beard. He then weighs the hair and divides it into three parts. The shaving of the head and beard was itself a sign of mourning, shame, and humiliation, fitting for the disgrace about to fall on Jerusalem.

Each third of the hair carries a meaning, which God spells out. A third is burned in the fire in the midst of the city, picturing those who will die by pestilence and famine within the besieged walls. A third is struck with the sword around the city, picturing those who will fall by the sword. And a third is scattered to the wind, picturing those who will be dispersed among the nations, pursued by a drawn sword.

The thoroughness of the judgment is overwhelming. Sword, famine, and scattering will fall upon the city until it is emptied. This is no partial or symbolic slap; it is the comprehensive undoing of a people who would not turn. The hair, once part of the prophet, is consumed, cut, and scattered, leaving almost nothing.

Yet notice the mercy hidden in the act. God tells Ezekiel to take a small number of the hairs and bind them in his skirt, in the fold of his garment. Even in the midst of sweeping judgment, God preserves a remnant. The judgment is severe and just, but it is not the absolute end of God's purposes for His people.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's judgment on persistent sin can be thorough and severe, not partial.
- Sword, famine, and scattering picture the comprehensive consequences of rebellion.
- The shaved hair signifies the shame and humiliation that sin finally brings.
- God's judgments are real and weighty, never empty threats.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God spell out the meaning of each third of the hair so plainly?
- How does the thoroughness of this judgment confront a casual view of sin?
- What does the seriousness of these consequences stir in your own heart?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*The defiled bread and meager rations pictured the suffering that sin brings. When have you seen sin promise satisfaction but deliver only emptiness, scarcity, and ruin in your own experience or in others' lives?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Return to the small detail that shines like a light in a dark chapter: God tells Ezekiel to bind a few of the hairs in the fold of his garment. Amid the burning, the cutting, and the scattering, a handful is kept safe, near to the prophet, held in his skirt. This is the doctrine of the remnant, woven quietly into the heart of judgment.

Throughout Scripture, even when God's judgment falls heavily, He preserves a faithful remnant through whom He continues His purposes. He did not let the wickedness of Jerusalem swallow

up His larger plan. A people would survive, return, and through that surviving line God would eventually bring the Messiah into the world.

This reveals something essential about God's character. His judgments, however severe, are never the failure of His mercy. He judges sin justly and at the same time preserves a way forward for His redemptive purposes. Wrath and mercy meet; justice is satisfied, yet hope is not extinguished.

For the believer this is deep comfort. The God who judges sin is the same God who keeps His promises and preserves His people. Even in our darkest seasons of discipline and consequence, He has not abandoned His purpose to save. The few hairs bound in the garment whisper that God's mercy outlasts His judgment.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Even in severe judgment, God faithfully preserves a remnant for His purposes.
- God's judgments are never the failure of His mercy; wrath and mercy meet in His character.
- The preserved remnant carried forward God's plan that would bring the Messiah.
- God's faithfulness to His promises endures even through seasons of judgment (Romans 11:5).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the preserved remnant change the way you read this dark chapter?
- Why is it important to hold God's justice and His mercy together?
- How does God's faithfulness in judgment give you comfort in hard seasons?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*God divided the shaved hair into thirds for sword, famine, and scattering, yet bound a few hairs in His garment. What does this preservation of a small remnant teach us about God's faithfulness and mercy even in the midst of severe judgment?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

In chapter five God explains why this judgment falls. He set Jerusalem in the midst of the nations to display His glory, and gave her His statutes and judgments. Yet she changed His judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and rebelled against His ways more than the countries around her. Having been given great light, she sinned with even greater guilt.

This is a vital principle: greater knowledge brings greater accountability. The pagan nations around Jerusalem had not received God's law, yet Jerusalem, who had, behaved worse than they did. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Those who have known God's truth most clearly are held to the highest account for how they live.

This is a searching word for any class that has long sat under sound teaching. It is possible to be rich in knowledge and poor in obedience, to know the truth thoroughly and yet rebel against it persistently. The very light that should have led to faithfulness becomes, when ignored, the measure of greater guilt.

Let the class take this soberly to heart, yet rightly. Each person bears the guilt of his own sin, not an inherited guilt (Ezekiel 18:20). The point is not despair but honest self-examination: those who have heard much must do something with what they have heard. Knowledge that does not lead to obedience only increases our accountability before God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Greater knowledge of God's truth brings greater accountability for obedience (Luke 12:48).
- Jerusalem sinned with greater guilt because she had received greater light than the nations.
- Knowing the truth without obeying it increases, rather than lessens, our responsibility.
- Each person bears the guilt of his own sin, not an inherited guilt (Ezekiel 18:20).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does greater knowledge of God's truth bring greater accountability?
- How might long familiarity with the truth tempt us toward complacency in obedience?
- What is one area where your obedience needs to catch up with your knowledge?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*These chapters are heavy with warning. How can you let the certainty of God's judgment produce in you not despair, but a deeper urgency to repent, to live faithfully, and to warn others in love?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

These chapters are heavy with warning, and we should let them weigh on us. But God's purpose in such warnings is never merely to terrify; it is to turn hearts back to Him before the judgment falls. The whole dramatic enterprise of the sign-acts is an act of mercy, a vivid alarm sounded loudly enough that even hardened hearts might wake and repent.

There is a right and a wrong way to respond to the certainty of God's judgment. The wrong way is despair, throwing up our hands as though all is lost. The right way is repentance, urgency, and renewed faithfulness. The certainty of judgment is meant to make us serious about sin, quick to turn, and earnest to warn others while there is still time.

Consider how the watchman theme from the previous lesson connects here. If judgment is certain and just, then the loving thing is not to stay silent but to warn. Ezekiel's costly

obedience, lying on his side, eating defiled bread, shaving his head, was an act of love for people in mortal danger. Our warnings to the lost flow from the same love.

Encourage the class to let the weight of these chapters produce holy urgency rather than gloom. The certainty of judgment makes the gospel precious and the work of warning urgent. We do not warn from fear or harshness, but from the sober knowledge that judgment is real and the love that longs for people to be saved.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's warnings are acts of mercy meant to turn hearts back before judgment falls.
- The certainty of judgment should produce repentance and urgency, not despair.
- Loving others means warning them faithfully when they are in real danger.
- Sober awareness of judgment makes the gospel precious and the work of warning urgent.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between responding to judgment with despair and with repentance?
- How can the certainty of judgment fuel urgency rather than gloom?
- Who might God be calling you to warn in love because the danger is real?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*The judgment on Jerusalem displays the perfect justice and holiness of God, the same character that required the cross, where Christ bore the judgment our sin deserved. How does seeing the seriousness of judgment here deepen your gratitude for what Jesus endured in our place?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Stand back now and let the full weight of these chapters settle. The judgment on Jerusalem is a display of the perfect justice and holiness of God. He cannot simply wink at sin; His holy character demands that rebellion be answered. The brick, the iron wall, the famine, and the divided hair all proclaim a God who is utterly just.

But here is the wonder of the gospel. The same holiness and justice that required judgment on Jerusalem is the holiness and justice that required the cross. God did not set aside His justice to save us. At Calvary, His justice was fully satisfied, because Jesus bore in our place the judgment our sin deserved. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When we see how seriously God regards sin in Ezekiel four and five, the cross becomes infinitely more precious. The judgment we deserved, the sword, the famine, the scattering of the soul from God, fell instead upon Christ. He drank the cup of wrath so that we might drink the cup of blessing. The iron wall of God's opposition to sin met its end in the body of the Son.

Let the class marvel at this. The very chapters that frighten us with judgment drive us straight to gratitude for the One who bore that judgment. The God who is too holy to overlook sin is the God who loved us enough to bear its penalty Himself in the person of His Son.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The judgment on Jerusalem displays the perfect justice and holiness of God.
- God did not set aside His justice to save us; it was satisfied at the cross.
- Christ bore in our place the judgment our sin deserved (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8–9).
- Seeing the seriousness of judgment makes the cross of Christ infinitely more precious.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the seriousness of judgment in these chapters deepen your view of the cross?
- What does it mean that God's justice was satisfied rather than set aside at Calvary?
- How should gratitude for Christ bearing our judgment shape the way you live?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Looking back across these sign-acts and the judgment they portray, name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to make you more like Jesus, whether in sober reverence for God's holiness, in urgency to warn others, or in gratitude for the salvation purchased at the cross.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

As we close, gather up the whole of these sobering chapters. Ezekiel acted out the certainty of judgment with brick and iron pan, bore the people's iniquity on his side, dramatized famine with rationed bread, and divided his shaved hair into sword, famine, and scattering, yet bound a remnant safely in his garment. Through it all God revealed His holiness, His justice, His careful accounting of sin, and His enduring mercy.

Every part of this presses us toward Christ. Jesus took the seriousness of sin more soberly than anyone, and He bore its judgment willingly. To grow more like Him is to share His reverence for the Father's holiness, His urgency to seek and save the lost, and His love that bears burdens rather than standing aloof.

Invite each student to be specific. It is easy to be sobered by these chapters and remain unchanged. Far better to name one concrete way the Lord is forming us through this passage: perhaps a deeper reverence for God's holiness, a renewed seriousness about a particular sin, a fresh urgency to warn someone in love, or a swelling gratitude for the cross.

End by lifting the class's eyes from the besieged brick to the crucified and risen Lord. The God who would not overlook Jerusalem's sin is the God who bore our sin in His Son, and He is

shaping us, warning by warning and mercy by mercy, into the image of the One who took our judgment and gave us His righteousness.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Spiritual growth moves from being sobered by truth to being transformed by it.
- Reverence for God's holiness, urgency to warn, and gratitude for the cross each point toward Christ.
- The God who judges sin justly bore our judgment in His Son and is forming us into His image (Romans 8:29).
- Naming one concrete response helps the truth take root in daily life.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is one specific way this passage is forming you to be more like Jesus?
- Which is most needed in you right now: reverence for God's holiness, urgency to warn, or gratitude for the cross?
- How will you put one of those into practice before our next lesson?