

## Ezekiel Chapters 3 and 4- John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson "Understanding Ezekiel's mission and how it affects our "calling" as Christians".
  - a) In this lesson, God explains to Ezekiel exactly what He (God) expects of him.
    - i) God lays out a promise of punishment to Ezekiel if He fails to obey God.
  - b) This gets back to an issue I raised in the first lesson: Does God punish believers and how does that affect our lives? If our salvation is strictly based on Jesus dying for our sins and our trust that Jesus is God, can and how does God punish believers?
    - i) In other words, does God punish Christians who fail to do what God asked them to do? Are there punishments in heaven for failures to be obedient to God?
    - ii) Is that why the Roman Catholics teach of "purgatory"? Yes, this is where the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory comes from. Yes, some Catholics admit that the bible never mentions the existence of purgatory, but they see passages in the Old and New Testament about Christians who don't obey God and this is why they came up with the concept of the existence of a purgatory.
    - iii) With that said, most Protestant and Orthodox Christians don't believe in the existence of purgatory. So, what about places like Chapter 3 in Ezekiel, where God promises to punish Ezekiel if he fails to preach his message?
      - a) First of all, that's a moot point in that Ezekiel did cooperate. ☺
      - b) Second, my answer is God punishes us in "this" lifetime when we fail to be obedient to His commands. We suffer in this lifetime and the "worse" thing that can happen to us is we are "taken out of the ballgame" in that God can shorten the life of those who are "His", but fail to be His witnesses!
2. On this happy note, ☺ I can now get back to the topic of these two chapters:
  - a) The main theme of Chapter 3 is God giving His instructions to Ezekiel in terms of what God expects Ezekiel to "do" as His prophet.
    - i) God explains to Ezekiel "who" he is to preach to and what is the message.
    - ii) The "who" is Ezekiel's fellow Israelites and the message is "repentance". The idea is their Babylonian captivity is God ordained and is due to national (corporate) disobedience. Despite that fact, God still has future plans for the nation of Israel.
  - b) Chapter 4 gives the first illustration of what God called Ezekiel to do.
    - i) In Chapter 4, Ezekiel gives a "visual demonstration" to the Israelites around him about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. One has to remember that when Ezekiel started his ministry, the country of Judah (the southern kingdom) still existed and was still a separate entity from Babylon. The city of Jerusalem had not yet "fallen" to the Babylonian Empire.
    - ii) Chapter 4 also gives this "strange illustration" of how long Israel is to suffer for their sins. There is a "430 day" punishment and we'll discuss that in this lesson.
  - c) At this point, it is best I start the text, and then I'll come back to these themes as we go.
3. Chapter 3, Verse 1: And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel."
  - a) It is best at this point to remember where we left off at the end of Chapter 2:
    - i) In the first two chapters God "introduced" Himself to Ezekiel in a strange vision that involved four angelic creatures.
    - ii) The last part of Chapter 2 described a "voice of a man" coming from a throne located above where these four angelic creatures were located.
    - iii) Whoever the voice was, it was enough to scare Ezekiel to fall on his face (assumedly in fear). It is interesting to me that all of the "weird stuff" in the last lesson about the angelic creatures didn't scare Ezekiel, or at least he didn't say so.

- iv) At the same time, the voice over the "throne" did scare Ezekiel. Ezekiel somehow knew he was in the presence of God and the "voice of God" speaking to Ezekiel was enough to scare him.
  - v) The only actual instructions the "voice of God" gave Ezekiel in Chapter 2 was God telling Ezekiel to take a scroll and eating it.
  - vi) All of this is review from Chapter 2. As I like to state every now and then, the chapter breaks were added many centuries after the text was written.
- b) With all of that background out of the way, Verse 1 of Chapter 3 is God telling Ezekiel (God calls Ezekiel "son of man" as to remind Ezekiel that he is a created being by God) to eat a scroll and speak to the house of Israel.
- i) What the scroll said, is a mystery. The end of the last chapter said the scroll spoke of "lament and mourning and woe" (NIV translation). What I suspect that meant is that the scroll speaks of the planned punishment on the nation of Israel for their disobedience to God. The scroll's words may have even been part of the book of Leviticus. There is a chapter in Leviticus stating promised punishments for disobedience to God. We'll discuss that chapter more through this lesson.
- c) Notice Ezekiel was called to speak to the Israelites. There is no distinction between the long gone northern kingdom called "Israel" and the still existing, but faltering southern kingdom of "Judah". Ezekiel's message is to all Israelites.
4. Verse 2: So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. <sup>3</sup> Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.
- a) In Verses 2 and 3, we have the actual "eating" of the scroll. Whether or not Ezekiel actually physically ate this scroll is debated. The main idea is that Ezekiel is to digest the words of the scroll so they could be preached to the house of Israel.
    - i) Personally, if God told me to eat a scroll, as strange as that sounded, I would be too scared not to eat it. I take the view that this is literal. Ezekiel stated that the taste was "sweet in his mouth", as if the actual eating process was not that bad.
  - b) Remember the content of the scroll was full of "woes". So why would it taste "sweet"?
    - i) One answer is God made it taste sweet so Ezekiel could literally digest it.
    - ii) Others argue that it is Ezekiel understanding God's "righteousness" in pronouncing this judgment against Israel.
    - iii) Getting back to the "punishments", Leviticus Chapter 26 essentially lays out a whole series of punishments if the Israelites failed to obey God. Part of that list includes the promise by God to drive the Israelites out of the land (Lev. 26:32-33) if the Israelites fail to obey Him. With that said, some argue the "sweetness" is Ezekiel understood that God was right for carrying out this punishment as the Israelites are going to suffer the consequences promised to them centuries earlier.
5. Verse 4: He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. <sup>5</sup> You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel-- <sup>6</sup> not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you.
- a) God called Ezekiel to speak to the Israelites. Ezekiel was not called to preach to a foreign nation, but to those who understand about the concept of "the" God of the bible.
    - i) Here is where Ezekiel's training as a priest would be beneficial.
    - ii) Ezekiel would not have to explain the "basics" as his audience would understand that he is talking about "the" God of the bible.
    - iii) If one feels called by God to go work in a foreign country, one has to learn the language or work with good translators. Further, one's style of preaching may even have to change as one's illustrations may be irrelevant to that culture.

- b) This verse does not mean all Christians are only called to preach in our hometown or home country. It just means Ezekiel himself was called to preach to the Israelites.
    - i) God calls most of us to work "where we are planted". There are some who are called to work in foreign lands. How do I know what God wants of me? The best answer is to ask Him. The next answer is God leads us where He wants us to go. He does not drag us from "point A to point B". It is a matter of moving and trusting that God is directing our steps.
    - ii) Let me give an example: I know of someone who has a large ministry specializing in apologetics (i.e., defending the truth of the Gospel). He has stated that he has never received any special vision or any voice of God telling him to do this. He just started doing it. The "sign" that it was God's will was simply based on the success of the ministry and his talent and desire to teach apologetics.
  - c) With that said, God does lead some people down certain paths in ministry work. Just as God put it on the heart of a person to start an apologetic ministry, so God spoke to Ezekiel about what to preach and who to preach it to. My point is never to put God in a box. If God wants to speak verbally to someone He can. If God just wants to put a desire in our heart and see if we follow that desire, He does.
    - i) Another point is we cannot force God to tell us what to do. It is up to us to "move" and then let God direct us His way, not ours. (See Proverbs 3:6 on this principal.)
  - d) Getting back to these verses, I believe God's point to Ezekiel is that he can't use the excuse that he's not qualified to be God's messenger. God is "encouraging" Ezekiel by telling him that his missionary work is to a people who verbally understand what he is saying.
  - e) The last part of Verse 6, by itself, needs explaining. It says, "Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you." What that means is God is telling Ezekiel that if God called him to a foreign country, those foreigners would listen to Ezekiel's message.
6. Verse 7: But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate. <sup>8</sup> But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. <sup>9</sup> I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house."
- a) Let's stand back and review a little history of Israel. Centuries earlier, Moses wrote what we call the first five books of the bible. It contained a detailed set of do's and don'ts that the Israelites were required to obey. The nation of Israel agreed to a contractual relationship with God wherein the Israelites promised to obey God's laws and God promised to protect that nation.
    - i) In the 600-year (more or less) history of Israel from Moses until Ezekiel, the nation of Israel, essentially failed to keep God's laws. Leviticus Chapter 26 (written by Moses) lays out a series of punishment warnings in "stages". It was God saying, "If you fail to obey me, I will do this". Then God says in effect, "If you still continue to disobey Me, next, I will do this". In the final set of warnings in Leviticus Chapter 26, God promised to kick Israel out of the land if they were disobedient.
    - ii) How does one reconcile God's unconditional promises to the nation of Israel with God's promise to kick them out of the land for disobedience? That will be a topic over much of the remainder of Ezekiel. For now, understand that God had to balance the act of dealing with Israel's disobedience as a nation with the fact that God still wanted to prove to the world that Israel is still God's chosen people.
  - b) With all of that said, Verses 6 to 9 is God's "warning" to Ezekiel that His message will not be well received by the Israelite people. God is telling Ezekiel that He will give Ezekiel the power to be as stubborn as the Israelites failure to listen to God's message.
  - c) God is warning Ezekiel that Israel is "hard headed" and won't listen to his message. God is telling Ezekiel in effect, "Don't worry about them. I'll make you as hard headed as they are, to give you the strength to deliver my message to them!"

- d) The question becomes, "If God knows that as a whole the nation of Israel will not listen to Ezekiel's message, why deliver it in the first place? A couple of reasons:
- i) First of all, it is so that the Israelites cannot argue "ignorance" about God's laws and God's promise of punishment for disobedience.
  - ii) Next, Ezekiel is written for our learning as well. The book was written so that future Israelites and yes, future Christians can understand that God demands obedience and there are consequences for disobedience. While Christians are not legally obligated to keep the law, Christians are obligated to be obedient to what God desires for our lives.
  - iii) The basic Christian principal of "loving one another" is about putting the needs of others before our selves. When we fail to show love to one another, we are being disobedient to God's calling for our lives. Can one be a "saved believer" and still fail to obey God's commandments? In theory yes, in practice, I would argue "no". A sign to those around us that we are believers in God is how we act out our faith. When we fail to do what God commands us to do, we can be punished by God.  
I'll stop on that scary point, and get back to the text. ☺
- e) So, does this mean that God can call us to an "unproductive missionary journey" like Ezekiel? It is possible. The main purpose of spreading the Gospel message is to call sinners to repentance. That means one has to face a lot of rejection as well. Most missionaries will tell you that there is a lot of failure on the road to success.
- i) Christians have to accept the fact that some people have "hard heads" just like the people Ezekiel had to face. God gives us the strength and ability to face such foes, and such foes are still out there today, as much as they were in Ezekiel's day.
  - ii) Most people of Jewish decent today are nonreligious. Just as many people who claim to be Christians never go to church and never give their hearts to Jesus. In both cases, many people give God "lip service", but never truly repent. That is who Ezekiel has to deal with in this book and that is who most Christians have to deal with on a day to day basis.
  - iii) God's point to Ezekiel is that his prophetic mission will not be easy and it will not be widely accepted. At the same time, we still have to do what God calls us to do and let God worry about the results, and not us. It is God's job to save people. It is our job to just spread the message of God's love and forgiveness as well as God's judgment on those who refuse to turn to Him.
7. Verse 10: And he said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. <sup>11</sup> Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says,' whether they listen or fail to listen."
- a) Notice that so far in Ezekiel, God has not given him any specific instructions as to what to say to the Israelites. All we have so far is God telling Ezekiel "who" is his audience.
  - b) God ends the "to whom shall you preach" section by telling Ezekiel is to go speak to the Israelites who are in exile in Babylon. Remember that Ezekiel did not know at this time that eventually all of Israel would be in exile. As of this point in history, there is only about 10,000 Israelites who were taken captive and moved to Babylon. (2nd Kings 24:14).
  - c) Verse 11 has God saying again in effect, "Preach this message to them, whether or not they are willing to listen and pay attention to you!"
8. Verse 12: Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound--May the glory of the LORD be praised in his dwelling place!-- <sup>13</sup> the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound. <sup>14</sup> The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me. <sup>15</sup> I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days--overwhelmed.

- a) Remember that Ezekiel was seeing a "vision". If you recall from the last lesson, Ezekiel spent a lot of time describing four angelic creatures with four faces and four wings each. Ezekiel then understood that he was transported to the throne of God.
  - b) Here in Verse 12, we have a reminder that this is a vision. Ezekiel states in this verse that the Spirit of God "lifted him up". In Verses 12-13, we have an "encore appearance" of the strange angelic creatures described in Chapters 1 and 2. ☺ In Verse 14, the "spirit" then took Ezekiel back to where he was living in Babylon. In other words, as Ezekiel was leaving the heavenly throne, Ezekiel heard a loud rumbling sound, which was made by these four angelic creatures as Ezekiel was leaving the room.
    - i) Ezekiel mentioned "The glory of the Lord be praised" before being sent home. I think that is Ezekiel's way of thanking God for what He told Ezekiel.
  - c) In Verse 14, as Ezekiel was leaving this scene, Ezekiel said he left in "bitterness and in the anger of my spirit". I don't think Ezekiel had any regrets of what he saw. Ezekiel is describing the power God has given him to preach the message. Remember God told Ezekiel that he would be as "hard headed" as the people he was preaching to. I think what we are reading in Verse 14 is the "new, changed Ezekiel now prepared to preach".
    - i) There is a message in that for you and me. Whatever mission God calls us to, God also provides us with the power to carry out that mission. If God calls us to be a preacher or teacher, God provides us with the physical skills to carry out that job. The same idea is applied to whatever role God has called us to do.
    - ii) The point is God does not just tell us to "Go do something and the "how" is your problem! When God calls us to a particular ministry, God also provides us with the power to carry out whatever endeavor He has called us to do.
  - d) All of this leads to Verse 15. It says that Ezekiel was now "done with the vision" and now Ezekiel was among a colony of exiled Jews by the Kebar River. As I stated in the last lesson, this river is a "canal" today and is located in modern Iraq.
    - i) Ezekiel then says he didn't say anything for seven days. The text says Ezekiel was overwhelmed. Ezekiel probably spent a lot of time contemplating the vision and what it meant for his life.
    - ii) So why did Ezekiel wait seven days? Maybe Ezekiel didn't know what to do next, or where to begin preaching. No problem, as God spoke to Ezekiel at the end of the seven-day period. This is another reminder that when we are not sure what to do next, we are to ask God.
9. Verse 16: At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>17</sup> "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. <sup>18</sup> When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. <sup>19</sup> But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.
- a) Let me give you the "big picture" first: Ezekiel was told to warn the wicked that they will suffer in hell. The idea is that if Ezekiel warns the Israelites and they don't listen, then the Israelites have no one to blame but themselves. If Ezekiel fails to preach God's message, God will hold Ezekiel responsible for failing to tell them.
  - b) Let's deal with the tougher question first: Does this mean that all of us are held responsible for the fate of nonbelievers if we fail to preach the Gospel message?
    - i) The short answer is no. This calling is to Ezekiel, not to all believers.
    - ii) Jesus does call on us to spread the Gospel message, but we are not held accountable if we do or don't preach the Gospel to others in term of the salvation of every person in earshot. In short, our "rewards" in heaven are based on our loyalty to what God calls us to do, but not all of us are called to "preach".

- iii) Let me put this concept another way: Let's suppose God has called you or me to a particular ministry: Let's see we are called to lead a bible study. Let's say we lead a church or let's say God put us in charge of raising children. Does that mean we are responsible for teaching God's truth to those under us in that role? I would argue "yes" in that we are to teach the bible and explain God's plan of salvation.
  - iv) If we fail to do this, does that mean we can lose our salvation? Of course not. Our salvation is strictly based on our trust of Jesus' payment of our sins. What it may mean is that if we are in charge of that group and we fail to be a faithful teacher of what God calls us to teach, God may take away that ministry from us as we are not being a good witness to Him. Whether or not the people we are witnessing to actually accept Jesus and change is up to God, and not up to us.
  - c) Now that I've filled all of us (me included) with guilt, we can get back to Ezekiel. ☺
    - i) First, let's get back to who Ezekiel was sent to: "A watchman for the house of Israel". Remember that only a small portion of the Israelites at this time were in exile in Babylon. Little did Ezekiel realize at this time that much of Israel would soon come to Babylon. Therefore, God is describing the scope of Ezekiel's ministry.
      - a) Does that mean Ezekiel was to preach to every Jewish person individually? No. It just means Ezekiel was to preach publicly.
    - ii) The text essentially says that God held Ezekiel accountable to preach a message of repentance to them. If Ezekiel failed to preach that message, the "blood" of the Israelites will be on the "head" of Ezekiel.
      - a) Well, since Ezekiel did what God commanded him to do, we can't say with any sort of certainty what would Ezekiel's punishment be if he failed.
      - b) The issue is "being a good witness". When the nation of Israel failed to obey God, the Israelites were eventually banished from the land. In fact, many Israelites were killed by the Babylonians as part of their effort to conquer Israel. If Ezekiel had not warned Israel of their failure to turn to God, Ezekiel probably would have suffered some sort of similar fate.
      - c) I believe the main issue is repentance of the Israelites. If Ezekiel failed to do what God called him to do, he might still be saved, but I believe Ezekiel would have suffered some horrible punishment in this lifetime if he failed.
    - iii) Ezekiel was called to be a "watchman" in Verse 17. In ancient times, most cities had high walls around the city to prevent invasions. A watchman is someone who would stay up all night along the wall. He would be trained to look and listen for signs of an enemy approaching so the "watchman" could warn the city.
      - a) God used the watchman analogy on Ezekiel. God is saying to Ezekiel that he must warn the Israelites of the danger of not turning to God as if Ezekiel was a watchman on the wall and spotted an enemy approaching.
10. Verse 20: "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.
- a) Suppose a "good Christian person" turns to evil. They change their lives to one where they openly commit some sort of grievous sin.
  - b) This verse is saying that when that person turns for the worse, God puts a "stumbling block" in front of them and that person will die in their sins. God further says that since Ezekiel did not warn this "sinner" they will die in their sins.
  - c) These verses mean that God called Ezekiel to publicly preach "repentance" of their sins. It is our sins that separate us from God. God needs people who believe in Him to preach to others the danger of not turning from one's sins.
  - d) Does that mean we have to be perfect to preach to others? No. It does mean we have to realize what we are doing is wrong and make every effort to turn from that sin.

- i) Further, we are to seek God's forgiveness when we do wrong. That is the message to preach: God exists and He is willing to forgive us of our sins if we are willing to turn from that lifestyle and agree that God was "right".
    - ii) God is telling Ezekiel to preach repentance so that people would have no excuse before God that they didn't know any better. While you and I are not called to publicly preach to a whole nation, we are called to be witnesses for God both in how we live our life and proclaiming the good news of Jesus.
    - iii) Does God hold us accountable if we fail to preach to the person next to us who is sinning? There is no clear answer on that issue. There are times when God does call me to say something to someone and other times God wants me to keep silent. As a general principle God does call us to spread the Gospel message, but God does not call everyone to an Ezekiel type of ministry.
  - e) I do take the view that if God puts people "under us", then God does hold us accountable for what we teach. James (3:1) says that bible teachers will receive a more strict judgment than non-bible teachers on judgment day. In that sense, those called to lead bible studies pay the price of a stricter judgment on this issue. In other words, God holds us accountable for what we teach about Him to others.
    - i) Let me add one more example: I knew an elder in a church who led bible studies. He taught God's word faithfully and accurately. However, he left his wife and children due to struggles in his marital relationship. Do I believe that man is still saved? Of course, however he lost the privilege of being a bible teacher and an elder for failing to be the type of person God wanted him to be in his personal life.
    - ii) That is an example of when God calls someone to leadership, God holds them accountable in all that they do and they may suffer if they fail to be obedient to God in all of their lives.
11. Verse 21: But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself."
- a) In Verse 21, Ezekiel is told the "reverse": If Ezekiel warned a righteous man (or woman) not to sin and that righteous man or woman does not sin, then Ezekiel has helped to save their eternal life.
  - b) Now, doesn't "everybody" sin in their lives? Of course. The issue is seeking forgiveness of one's sins and be willing to turn their lives over to God. The point is in this case, God can work through Ezekiel (or you or me) to save someone's eternal soul as that person turned to God.
    - i) Suppose you are not a "bible teacher", but just a regular Christian. Still, there may be a situation where we are talking to someone about God and what He expects for all of our lives. If that person we are talking to makes an effort to turn to God and seek Him, then know that God has used you or me to "save" them for eternity.
  - c) Remember that neither Ezekiel nor us is responsible to actually save anyone. That is God's job. Ezekiel's job and our job is just to preach the truth.
12. Verse 22: The hand of the LORD was upon me there, and he said to me, "Get up and go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you." <sup>23</sup> So I got up and went out to the plain. And the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown.
- a) Now in Verse 22, God tells Ezekiel to move from his present location and go out to some nearby "plain" where God will speak to Ezekiel there.
  - b) Why did God call Ezekiel to move to this new location? Can't God speak to Ezekiel where he was before? Of course. God can speak to us at anytime and anyway God chooses. Sometimes God chooses to make us move to a different location for some reason.
    - i) I suspect the reason God called Ezekiel to "move" here, is that God wanted to talk to Ezekiel privately without the Jewish people around Ezekiel asking him questions about his talks with God.

- ii) Sometimes when God calls us on a mission, He first wants us to "get away" for a time being so we can just focus on Him and not our world around us. It is not a hard fast rule, but it does occur fairly often. How do you know when God is calling us to a different location for awhile? Ask Him. In Ezekiel's case, God told him to go from "point A to point B". If God wants us to move to a different location for a while, I find that God makes it obvious where He wants us.
  - c) Anyway, Ezekiel obeys God's command to move. At this "plain", Ezekiel saw the "Glory of the Lord" in the same way he saw God in the angelic vision of Chapter 2. Ezekiel fell on his face like he did in Chapter 2 when he realized he was in God's presence.
13. Verse 24: Then the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet. He spoke to me and said: "Go, shut yourself inside your house.<sup>25</sup> And you, son of man, they will tie with ropes; you will be bound so that you cannot go out among the people.<sup>26</sup> I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, though they are a rebellious house.
- a) When we think of being a witness for God, we think of speaking out loud, either in a pulpit setting or some private setting. Sometimes "speaking for God" is being silent on a matter, especially when facing sin.
  - b) That is what Ezekiel is going to go through. God told Ezekiel to shut himself in his house.
  - c) God then warns Ezekiel that they (the Israelites) will bind him up in ropes so that he cannot preach even if he wanted to. This gets back to the idea that many people just don't want to hear about repentance. They will make every effort to get us to shut up. In Ezekiel's case, they bound him in ropes in his own house.
    - i) What's the lesson? If we preach about God, don't expect massive conversion. If anything, there will be forces telling us to be quiet and such people will make efforts to get us to keep quiet. If you read Paul's missionary journeys, there are regular mentions of the fact he was constantly opposed in his preaching.
  - d) Getting back to the text, in Verse 26, God tells Ezekiel that his tongue will stick to the roof of his mouth, so he is unable to resist those who are tying him up!
    - i) This means that God "literally" shut Ezekiel up so he couldn't speak.
    - ii) So how are we supposed to preach repentance if God "shuts up our tongues". God wanted Ezekiel to preach by visual examples, as we'll discover in the next chapter.
    - iii) Sometimes "silence" and visual methods are the best methods to teach. Ezekiel is going to demonstrate God's point by visual demonstrations. Sometimes, such demonstrations are far more powerful than anything we could say.
14. Verse 27: But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.
- a) Notice in this verse, that the actual conversion process is up to God and not up to Ezekiel. God just calls Ezekiel (and you and me) to preach a message of repentance of turning to God. Whoever listens and responds is up to God.
  - b) This verse also warns that "as a whole" Israel is a rebellious nation of people. This is God warning Ezekiel that as a whole, the nation of Israel will not listen to his message. There may be individuals who turn to God, but for the most part, Ezekiel would be rejected.
    - i) Nothing has changed today. Most people of Jewish decent give God "lip service" at best and don't turn to Him with their lives. Most people who come from Christian cultures don't go to church and give God "lip service" when it comes to changing their lifestyle in a way that is pleasing to God.
    - ii) Think of it this way: If you are a devout Christian, don't most of your relatives and non-church acquaintances look at you as that "crazy religious person" who takes God way too seriously? If that's the case, welcome to the club! ☺

- iii) At my greater family gatherings, I'm always the one they ask to pray at meals as if I'm more special to God than they are! There is a sense that others know we make an effort to be close to God, and others refuse to make a similar effort.
  - c) Getting back to the verse, the point is we can expect resistance when we talk to God about others. Many, if not a majority of people will ignore God's call to repentance even though it will save their eternal soul.
- 15. Chapter 4, Verse 1: "Now, son of man, take a clay tablet, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. <sup>2</sup> Then lay siege to it: Erect siege works against it, build a ramp up to it, set up camps against it and put battering rams around it. <sup>3</sup> Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.
  - a) In Chapter 4, Ezekiel's actual ministry work to the Israelites begins. Notice that a few verses ago, God called Ezekiel to be silent and allowed him to be "tied up" in his house. My point here is that God allows us to be in situations that are not pleasant to us, and we may be in those situations even when we are doing or want to do the right thing. One has to accept the fact such situations are not permanent, and we have to trust that God has a plan in such situations. Here in Chapter 4, we see Ezekiel "preaching" a message of repentance not by talking, but by building a visual model.
    - i) Those of us who have taught children in Sunday School understand "models". The idea is some people react better to a visual display than anything we say!
  - b) With that said, let's describe this "visual model" that Ezekiel is asked to build.
    - i) First, Ezekiel is asked to draw the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet. This was a standard "writing tablet" of that time era. Remember Ezekiel is preaching to Jews, so they would know what Jerusalem would look like.
    - ii) After Ezekiel is to finishing drawing Jerusalem, Ezekiel is to set up "siege walls". When a foreign army was attacking a city, they would surround a city and attempt to conquer the walls. That is what is being represented here.
    - iii) Ezekiel was asked to set up models of foreign army camps around the city and battering rams which are large wooden poles designed to ram locked gates.
    - iv) In summary, Ezekiel is to show "Jerusalem" as being under siege. As of the time of this vision, this event has not occurred yet.
  - c) One has to remember what Ezekiel is "up against". At the same time Ezekiel was preaching in Babylon, Jeremiah was preaching a similar message in Israel. There were also false prophets saying the time of captivity would be short and those false prophets were saying Jerusalem would never fall to the Babylonians.
    - i) Ezekiel is rebuking the false prophets and those claiming that Jerusalem would not fall with this visual model of Jerusalem being captured!
  - d) Let's move on to the "public witness" here in Chapter 4. God calls Ezekiel to perform a visual demonstration to the Israelites who are in eyesight of Ezekiel.
    - i) Now imagine if you or I were called to this type of ministry. We wouldn't speak, but just make models how people would die if they don't repent.
- 16. Verse 4: "Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. <sup>5</sup> I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel. <sup>6</sup> "After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year. <sup>7</sup> Turn your face toward the siege of Jerusalem and with bared arm prophesy against her. <sup>8</sup> I will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your siege.
  - a) Verses 4-8 has one of the strangest prophecies in the bible. To be truthful, most commentators have no idea what it represents. Let me explain to you what Ezekiel is doing and then I'll give you my view as to what it means.

- b) In these verses we have a "new topic" from the previous set of verses. In the previous set of verses, Ezekiel was told to make a model of the city of Jerusalem. In this model, the city of Jerusalem was to be under attack. Through this model, Ezekiel is demonstrating to the Israelites living in Babylon that the city of Jerusalem is going to fall to the Babylonians. As to the reason for the fall, we'll get a lot more into that in later lessons.
- c) Here in Verse 8, we have a new thing for Ezekiel to do. First, remember that God told Ezekiel to be silent. That means that whatever Ezekiel is doing here in these verses is something he is doing without talking.
- d) Essentially, what Ezekiel is told to do is lay on his left side for 390 days and then lay on his right side for another 40 days. Verse 6 says that each day represents a year. Most commentators argue that Ezekiel did not lay that way day and night, but this was a visual display where every day Ezekiel would go out of his house and perform this ritual as part of his demonstration of God's promised punishment on the Israelites.
- e) The text specifically mentions that Ezekiel should lay on his left side for 390 days for the "sins of the nation of Israel (the northern kingdom)" and then lay on his right side for another 40 days for the "sins of the southern kingdom of Judah".
  - i) Again, verse 6 specifically mentions that each day is to represent a year.
- f) Here is where experts on Ezekiel disagree with each other:
  - i) If you study the history of Israel, there was nothing significant that happened 430 years (390+40) years earlier or later in the history of the Israelites.
  - ii) The northern kingdom and southern kingdoms only existed for about 253 years since the split took place. Therefore, the 390 years and the 40 years have nothing to do with the length of the existence of the two kingdoms. Even if one adds for the additional years as a united kingdom, it has nothing to do with the length of time of 390 years plus 40 years.
- g) Here is what we know for sure: The 390 year and 40 year period of time represents a future punishment for both the nations of Israel and the nation of Judah. Verse 6 says that each day represents one year of punishment. Further, the Babylonian captivity lasted exactly 70 years. So what is this 390 year and 40 year punishment mean?
- h) With all that said, let me explain what I think it means:
  - i) First, let me explain why it is separated into 390 and 40 years. The number "40" in the bible is always associated with trials and testing. The Israelites were in the desert for 40 years. When Noah was in the flood, it rained for 40 days. When Jesus was being tested in the desert, He was there for 40 days. My sole point is that the number 40 represents a "testing period".
  - ii) With that said, I believe God wanted to punish all the Israelites for a combined period of 430 years, but he wanted to emphasize the number "40" as a trial period.
  - iii) Since Israel was not united again as a nation until after the Babylonian captivity, whatever this number meant, all the Israelites (northern and southern kingdom) would have to bear this time together.
  - iv) If you know the history of Israel, they were united as a people after the Babylonian captivity, but were never under self-rule until the 1940's. When the Persians conquered the Babylonians, the Israelites were allowed to return to their home land, but they were still part of that Persian Empire. When the Greeks' conquered the Persians, Israel became part of the Greek Empire. When the Romans conquered the Greeks, Israel was part of the Roman Empire. For many centuries starting in the middle ages, Israel was an "abandoned land" other than some "miscellaneous" Arabs and some Jews who lived there. It wasn't until after the Second World War that Israel was formed as an independent country again. It wasn't until 1967 when Israel fought some neighboring countries and the city of Jerusalem was recaptured by the Israelites and it became part of that country.

- i) Now comes the most "interesting" part of this lesson in my opinion. Earlier in this lesson, I made a few references to the Leviticus Chapter 26. This is one place in the bible where God lays out promised punishments to the Israelites if they failed to be obedient to God.
- i) There is a key phrase in Leviticus Chapter 26 repeated four times: God says that if the Israelites continue to disobey God, He will make their punishment seven times worse. (Reference Leviticus 26:18, 26:21, 26:24 and 26:28). The point is God gave the Israelites "one set of warnings". If they still failed to obey, then came the next set of punishments that God considers "seven times worse". If the Israelites still continued to disobey, then comes the next set of punishments that is seven times worse than the previous group. In the final set of punishments, God promises to kick the Israelites out of the land if they were disobedient.
- ii) This leads us back to the "430" year prophecy. Remember that Ezekiel had to lay on his left side for 390 days and lay on his right side for another 40 days. Verse 6 says this each day represents one year of future punishment. After the Babylonian captivity, Israel was united again as a country, but not under self-rule. The Babylonian captivity lasted exactly 70 years. So if the Israelites were out of the land for exactly 70 years, what is this 430 year (390 +40 year) punishment mean?
- iii) The answer lies in the Leviticus promise of "seven times worse". God lays out this principal in Leviticus that if the Israelites continue to disobey God, their punishment will be seven times worse. Since they were in captivity for 70 years, that means they now have 430 years (minus 70 years of captivity) or 360 years left. Since after 70 years the Israelites were still disobedient, the Israelites still owe God 360 years, but now the punishment is "seven times worse" or 7 times 360 years.
- a) If you do the math, that comes out close to our time era!
- iv) In the appendix of this lesson is a set of detailed calculations discussing these numbers and how it ties to the history of Israel.
- a) Here is where it gets really interesting: If one takes the "first date" where the Babylonians started their first siege of Israel, deduct seventy years for captivity and then deduct 360 times seven years, it comes out to exactly the modern year 1948, when Israel became a nation again.
- b) If one takes the date where Jerusalem was conquered, deduct seventy years for captivity and then deduct 360 times seven years, it comes out to exactly the modern year 1967, when Jerusalem was under Israelite control.
- c) My point to all of this is that the 430-year prediction ties to the existence of the modern nation of Israel based on the years of punishment.
- v) Let me end of all of this with the disclaimer that it is just a theory, but a theory that fits the facts better than any other explanation I've read about the 390 plus 40 years and there are lots of strange theories on just what this means.
- j) All of this leads to several important points for us to remember:
- i) First, what does any of this have to do with our relationship to God and our trust in Jesus as our savior? Nothing the direct sense. If this is true, and I believe it is, it does show that God is still working with the nation of Israel and the future restoration of the nation of Israel is part of God's redemptive plan.
- ii) Does one still have to believe in Jesus in order to have salvation? Of course. The common view among a lot of Evangelical Christians is that when Jesus comes back it will be obvious to the nation of Israel that they "blew it" as far as the issue of Jesus being the promised Messiah.
- iii) God made an unconditional promise to Abraham that the land of Israel would belong to his descendants. The fact that Israel "corporately" didn't recognize Jesus as their Messiah does not negate that promise.

- a) Therefore, in order for God to fulfill that promise to Abraham: 1) Israel has to be a united nation in the land again and 2) there has to be Jews living in the final days (whenever that happens) that recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The common view is that when Jesus returns, many Israelites living at that time will turn to Jesus as the promised Messiah.
  - iv) There are many Christians (including much of the Roman Catholic Church) that teach that God is "done" with Israel as a nation and God is now only focusing on forming a new nation of Christian believers. I'll argue that passages like this in Ezekiel (and Romans Chapter 11) argue that God is not done with the Israelites as a unique nation. My view is that if I can't trust God's unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel, how can I trust His promises to me through Jesus?
  - k) Gee, I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, but there are still seven more verses to go. ☺
- 17. Verse 9: "Take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them in a storage jar and use them to make bread for yourself. You are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side. <sup>10</sup> Weigh out twenty shekels of food to eat each day and eat it at set times. <sup>11</sup> Also measure out a sixth of a hin of water and drink it at set times. <sup>12</sup> Eat the food as you would a barley cake; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel." <sup>13</sup> The LORD said, "In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them."
  - a) Let's quickly review Ezekiel's "mission" up to this point. God told Ezekiel to be quiet in the sense that his message to the Israelites would be done through visual illustrations as opposed to Ezekiel actually speaking to the Israelites in captivity.
  - b) The first part of this chapter (Chapter 4) was about Ezekiel building a model of Jerusalem and showing the city as being under attack. The second part of this chapter was about Ezekiel laying on his left side for 390 days and his right side for 40 days and Verse 6 said that each day represents a year of punishment.
  - c) Now, in Verse 9, we see a "new illustration" to be performed by Ezekiel:
    - i) To sum it up, Ezekiel is only to eat a little bit of food every day and only drink what is about a pint of water every day.
    - ii) Even with Ezekiel not getting much exercise (laying down for 430 days), this amount of food and water is essentially "starving" conditions.
    - iii) The point is the nation of Israel will be starving when they are attacked by the Babylonians and have to live on minimal rations. Ezekiel will be visually demonstrating by this minimum food consumption what will happen to the Israelites for their failure to obey God.
  - d) As to the food itself, Ezekiel is to measure out the amount every day and carefully bake this "barley" food with human waste as fuel for the fire. No, God was not calling Ezekiel to eat human waste, just to use it as fuel for the fire. God's point is that the situation for the Israelites would be so bad, they would resort to human waste to make a fire and would eat small rations of food for their own survival.
- 18. Verse 14: Then I said, "Not so, Sovereign LORD! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth." <sup>15</sup> "Very well," he said, "I will let you bake your bread over cow manure instead of human excrement." <sup>16</sup> He then said to me: "Son of man, I will cut off the supply of food in Jerusalem. The people will eat rationed food in anxiety and drink rationed water in despair, <sup>17</sup> for food and water will be scarce. They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin.
  - a) One has to remember the Ezekiel was raised as a Jewish priest in training. Such a priest would never violate God's food laws as laid out in Leviticus. It is against that law to touch human waste. Ezekiel understood that human waste was only for "fuel", but he didn't want to have to touch it to use it as fuel. (Reference: 7:21).

- b) God grants Ezekiel that concession and let's Ezekiel use cow manure as fuel for the fire to bake his food. God's point is the Israelites would suffer so bad that the Israelites would be using human waste as fuel, but God allows Ezekiel this concession.
  - c) The last few verses of this chapter talk about how the people of Jerusalem will suffer the type of fate that Ezekiel is demonstrating by the way Ezekiel eats his meal.
  - d) God even says the residents of Jerusalem will waste away (be unhealthy and starving) due to a lack of food in the city during this time.
19. Let me end this lesson by getting back to the lesson theme. It is "Understanding Ezekiel's mission and how it affects our "calling" as Christians":
- a) Ezekiel was called by God to demonstrate to the Israelites how they were guilty of violating God's laws and would have to "corporately" suffer the consequences of not obeying God. This means that all Israelites, young and old would have to suffer. It meant the religious and the nonreligious alike would suffer.
  - b) My point is God judges us "in groups" as well as individually. Our salvation is based on our trust in God's forgiveness of our sins. At the same time we are all subject to "group accountability" based on say, what nation or what church we are part of. We don't get out of punishment just because we are more religious than the person next to us.
    - i) For example, if our church fails to be a good witness for God, our entire church can be punished. That could mean God could "end" that church or simply end the effectiveness of that church.
    - ii) As another example, if the nation of the United States fails to "corporately" pray to God, we can and do suffer as a nation, Christian and non-Christian alike.
  - c) Now let's get back to Ezekiel: If you ever wanted to be a prophet of God, look at what Ezekiel had to go through before you agree to be a prophet! God did call Ezekiel to be a prophet, but it meant literally starving himself as well as be unpopular with the Israelites around him. The point is to be used by God usually calls be being unpopular with the "world" around us and often means we have to suffer to show the fate of those who turn from God.
20. On that happy note, I'll wrap up this lesson. ☺ It went a little long, but I wanted show how both chapters fit the "Leviticus 26" model of disobedience. I wrote an appendix to this lesson giving more details of the "Modern Israel" fulfillment of this prophetic prediction.
21. First, let's pray: Father, we know that we all sin before You. We come to You pleading the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and our grateful that You have called us to salvation. Help us not to see these lessons on Ezekiel as "history" but as applications for our own life. While God does not call us to starve ourselves and build models, He does call us to be witnesses to a "dying world" around us. Help us to make a difference in the lives of other Christians around us and help us to be good witnesses to nonbelievers around us about what is to come. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

## Appendix: Further Explanation of the "430 year prediction and Modern Israel."

Let's start by saying this is a theory. Belief in this theory as correct or false has no affect upon one's salvation. I personally see this theory as the "most logical explanation" of what those 390 plus 40 years mean, so I laid it out. If it turns out I'm wrong one day, I'll shrug my shoulders and move on.

First, understand that the Jewish calendar has 360 days, not 365. Occasionally the Jewish calendar adds a month to catch up. A "clue" that God works on a 360-day calendar is Revelation 11, 2 and 3. It mentions a time span of exactly 42 months and exactly 1,260 days. If you divide 1,260 days by 42 months, that is exactly a 30-day month.

Now let's get back to Ezekiel Chapter 4: The theory is that Israel must bear the punishment for 430 years (390+40) for the sins of disobedience to God. If one deducts the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity from the 430 year time frame, that leaves 360 years. If God works a 30 day month that means that 360 years times 30 days in a month = 907,200 days. (See Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 29:10 in regards to the "70 years".)

I stated in the last lesson that the conquering of Israel by the Babylonians was in 3 stages. The day the first siege began is one way to measure the 70 years. Jeremiah predicted it would last exactly 70 years. The 70 years could be described as 25,200 days (70 years with a 360 day year). The first siege of Israel, as done by Babylon began in 606 B.C., It lasted until 537 B.C. when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and let the Jewish captives go home (those who wanted to) to Israel. (See 2nd Chronicles 36:22.)

As stated, July 23, 537 B.C. was the date the Israelites were release from captivity. It is recorded in history that the captivity did end in 537BC. It is only the exact day and month in 537 B.C. that is speculation. If one adds 907,200 days (360 years times a 360-day-year) from that July 23, 537 date, it comes out to May 14, of 1948, the day Israel became a nation again for the first time since before the Babylonian captivity. My point is 360 years (using a 360-day calendar) runs from the date Israel returned to the land (after the 70 year Babylonian captivity) until the date Israel became a country again in 1948.

There is a second way to measure the "70 years". There was a second and third siege of Israel by the Babylonians. In the first siege and the second siege, only some Israelites were taken captive and relocated in the Babylonian Empire. Ezekiel was taken captive as part of the second siege. The third siege resulted in the destruction and desolation of the city of Jerusalem. This period ended when a Persian king gave the authority to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. (Source: See Nehemiah Chapter 2).

Now, let's go to the "third siege of Babylon" when Jerusalem was destroyed. History shows that this third siege began in 587 B.C. It ended in 518 B.C. The Old Testament book of Ezra, describes the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. If August 16, 518 BC was the completion date of the walls of Jerusalem (again, only the month and day of the month is speculation), then 907,200 days later is exactly June 07 of 1967 when the "Six Day War" ended and the City of Jerusalem was now part of the modern country of Israel.

Another point to consider is that even if these dates were off by a few years, the prediction would still be impressive that Ezekiel's prediction ties to the times of Modern Israel. Personally, I take the view that God is "exact" when such predictions are made!

If one wants more details, including date calculations, most of the data comes from this web site. <http://www.khouse.org/articles/2000/276/> A second web site with good information on this is: <http://www.direct.ca/trinity/jerusalem.html> (This site makes reference to a Calendar Converter site. That links has changed and it is now: <http://www.fourmilab.ch/documents/calendar/>