

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Ezekiel 4-5”

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With

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Ezekiel 4-5

These two chapters of Ezekiel confront the reader with a series of “sign acts” on the part of the prophet. These signs are dramatic visualizations of events that are or will befall Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. They present a range of interpretive problems that are discussed in this episode.

pdf referenced:

[**Ezekiel 4-5**](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 114, Ezekiel 4-5. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you?

MSH: Good, still busy. I don't that's ever going to change. That's a good problem to have.

TS: Have you gotten any feedback about the Operation Get Naked Bible Podcast?

MSH: Not much.

TS: You haven't gotten in trouble with that yet?

MSH: No but I am sure if you push it I will.

TS: I'm pushing it so I'm hoping people out there are pushing and trying it. Every listener, one person by the end of the year expose them to show and see if they can't latch onto the content. That's what we're shooting for. We want everybody out there to get naked.

MSH: It's kind of boring to get hate mail for only one reason so we need to do a better job of drawing the ire of as many people for as many different reasons as we possibly can.

TS: No bad press?

MSH: All press is good press, or some such myth.

TS: I wonder what kind of press Ezekiel got back in the day?

MSH: I think most of it was probably tabloid kind of stuff. He would have been your kind of guy Trey.

TS: No comment.

MSH: Today, we're going to do chapters 4 and 5 of Ezekiel. I mentioned last time Chapter 3 ends from verse 16 on to the end with the first sign act. I keep using this phrase. It's an academic term for crazy stuff that Ezekiel does. He does these reenactments, visualizations, dramatic performances in some cases where he acts something out or does something behaviorally that is designed specifically to communicate to the people watching. And, of course, the people are going to gossip about what they saw, that God is communicating something to the captives or something is happening back in the homeland or whatever. Typically, it's not going to be good news. It's going to be related to trouble for Jerusalem. That's what we have here in chapters 4 and 5. So right after the first one at the end of chapter 3, which is Ezekiel shutting himself in the house and basically being put under by God and in some sense also just by his act of obedience, so himself, but being put under house arrest and being struck dumb. These were sort of to set the stage for the things that are going to follow. So it created the impression that from this point on whenever I'm out of the house, whenever I'm able to speak, it's because God is compelling it. God is producing it. God is behind it.

And so you better pay attention and listen. And we jump into chapter 4 with a whole series of these. There's actually going to be nine of them. But before we actually get into the passage, I want to read a little bit of commentary about what Block says about sign acts and Ezekiel in general so we get it fixed in our imaginations or minds what exactly we're talking about here. So Block writes, this is from the same commentary as I quoted a couple times before. He says,

“In the past, prophetic sign acts have been interpreted variously as rights originating out of sympathetic magic, evidence of psychological dysfunction, or expressions of prophetic ecstasy.”

MSH: Sympathetic magic is the idea like voodoo. You do something to or with an object and then something happens at a distance. You have scholars that interpret what Ezekiel does because in chapters 4 and 5, these things are going to be directed at Jerusalem. Some have developed an argument that this is an example sympathetic magic. I agree with Block. I don't think it is. I think it's kind of clear what it is. These are just dramatic reenactments or prophetic reenactments, sort of like prophecy in motion kind of things as opposed to there being a direct relationship. Psychological dysfunction we talked about in the introduction of Ezekiel and the whole notion of prophetic ecstasy. Back to Block, he says,

“A more common view is that the sign acts functioned as efficacious dramatizations that set in motion and brought about the events they represented.”

MSH: I'll stop here. He's going to say not in the sense that Ezekiel did something and then something happened, but when Ezekiel does something, either near time or real-time, God is acting so the fact that Ezekiel obeys and shows these things visually, God acts in correspondence with that. Some of what Ezekiel's doing and saying turns out to be real and true. Back to Block,

“Based on the assumption that the power of fulfillment would reside in the divine word itself, sign acts are looked upon as visible words so to speak with enhanced potency. Harbor the notion of an inherently efficacious power mistakenly attributes the effective force of the declaration to the word itself instead of the speaker of the word. According to Ezekiel, the divine word, whether oral or visual, will always be fulfilled, not because the pronouncement is inherently efficacious, but because the speaker is Yahweh. Some who question the efficacious view maintain that the primary function of sign acts is not to coerce events but merely to predict them. But this understanding overlooks obviously retrospective actions.”

MSH: For instance, we're going to hit that in Ezekiel 4:4-5. What Ezekiel's doing actually is something that's already happened. So there is a variety of relationships between the sign acts that Ezekiel will perform in these chapters and the real-time events as they either have happened, are happening, or will happen. They're not always the same. So back to Block,

“But this understanding overlooks obviously retrospective actions as well as those that portray contemporary realities, whether they be the exile's current circumstances, for instance, in chapter 4:12-15, or Yahweh's present disposition. Sign acts are best interpreted as dramatic performances designed to visualize a message, and in the process to enhance its persuasive force so that the observer's perceptions of a given situation might be changed and their beliefs and behavior modified. In adopting sign acts as a means of communicating his message, Ezekiel followed long-standing prophetic practice.”

MSH: Now, let's get into chapter 4 here. I want to decide where exactly I want to read. It's kind of difficult because these are going to come in rapid succession. Let's just list them out first. Let's do it this way. I mentioned a few moments ago that there are basically nine of these we're going to encounter in chapters 4 and 5. So Ezekiel's going to do nine things that are directed against Jerusalem, to the people of Judah that are still there back in the homeland prophetically speaking. Here's the list. There's going to be the siege of the brick. That's in chapter 4:1-2. There's going to be a making of a “griddle” which is actually a metal barrier between Ezekiel and the brick, chapter 4:3. Third, we're going to see Ezekiel's commanded to lie on his left and right sides, chapter 4:4-6. Fourth, Ezekiel is going to be facing the besieged brick which is going to have a picture of the city drawn on it and he's going to bear his arm, chapter 4:7.

The binding of Ezekiel is number five apparently, tying the arm in place and keeping him on his right side. That seems to be the case. He's going to be doing this for 390 days. It's not clear whether that means that he's continually bound 390 days or whether he repeats this act 390 times. That actually isn't completely clear from the text. Number six, he's going to be eating rationed food and water, so basically the rations of exiles, chapter 4:9-11. Seventh, he going to be eating cakes that were baked over excrement, chapter 4:12, 14-15. Eighth, he's going to shave his head dividing the hair and then disposing of the hair in different portions, chapter 5:1-2. Ninth, a remnant of the hair that he shaves off will be saved and preserved, chapter 5:3-4. Now, I want to read something else also Block throws in here about the signs because there's a lot of them here. Block says,

“The described elements seem to point to different events or phases of events. The nation's past history of rebellion would be in chapter 4:4-5. There's the siege of Jerusalem, chapter 4:1-3, 7-11, which would seem to postdate the earlier one. And then finally culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 5:1-2 and the last stage of the exile. The elements are not presented in a coherent and chronological order. There are also major logistical and conceptual problems. For example, what is the connection between bearing his arm in verse 7 and lying on his sides, verses 4-6? What is the meaning of family of Israel in verse 4? What's the meaning of the phrase, how could he lie on his side for 390 days? How could the prophet perform these actions when Yahweh had tied him up, apparently.”

MSH: In the earlier passage, there was ambiguity there but here in this chapter, verse 8, Yahweh does tie him up. And you get issues like this. How can he be doing these things given this set of circumstances that are at times described in relation to those things? So those are

natural questions. How can Ezekiel salvage a remnant of hair when he's already burned, chopped up, and scattered it? The wording of the text is clear enough that it allows for that but some have raised that question. He either got rid of three thirds or he didn't kind of reasoning. But the text is going to say he saved some of it but nevertheless, some people say there's a problem there.

“Assuming the report of the sign acts corresponds to the sequence in which they were performed, it is difficult to see how the nonverbal activity would've produced understanding in the audience.”

MSH: What Block is basically saying there is since they're not all really given the whole scope of what happens in Jerusalem precisely chronological, there would've been points where the audience wouldn't necessarily have known correctly what the chain of events that these acts describe really was. Block his saying there's a bit of disconnect there was well. He sketches out these issues, we'll depart from what he says as far as the problems, but he does have a proposal here. He says,

“Scholars have tended to attribute this presentation to a series of editorial expansions involving several hands. The material relating to the exile in particular is often deleted, therefore, as secondary. However, this dichotomy between siege and exile may be artificial. A more likely solution interprets the present text as an editorial or redactional conflation of the series of separate sign activities that must have been conducted over an extended period of time. The possibility that these performances need not have occurred in the present order obviates the need to harmonize apparently irreconcilable actions.”

MSH: That's an academese way of saying it's probably easiest and best just to presume that we're given this list of nine here because that's the way the final form of the book of Ezekiel was produced and these events are related but that doesn't necessarily mean that he did them all in the same order. Once you hit lying on the left side for 390 days, right side for 40, you can't really be doing that and be doing some of these other things as well is his point. This is what scholars have noticed and discussed. If you're lying on your left side, then you're lying on your left side. You can't be doing some of this other stuff because it's not just chapters 4 and 5. There's going to be other things occur in other chapters that Ezekiel would've been asked to do in the midst of this presumably 390 days stretch.

Their point is that he can't really be doing everything in the order of the way it's presented. All Block is saying is there's no real need to read it that way. They can be listed in a certain way because of a common association but that doesn't necessarily mean that he's trying to do something while he's lying on his left side and he can't really do it. How does that work out? That's sort of reading confusion into the text. Block is saying it's not necessary to do that. There's no reason why these things couldn't have happened over a long period of time and at different points of time and the way they're presented in literary form, the form of the book, doesn't require anything different. I think that's good advice. I wanted to mention it here because we do get a lot of sign acts mentioned here. We're going to run into this later. So if the

question ever pops in your head, how is Ezekiel doing that thing? Isn't he still in that 390 day lying on your left side period?

Well, he would be but maybe part of his day he lies on his left side and then he does that to perform that act but some other part of his day he's doing this other thing, or they're separated in some other way chronologically. So don't get distracted by these sorts of issues. Like Block says, these things have been noticed before. There are workable solutions that the text allows. Let's jump into chapter 4 here with the sign act that begins this chapter. So the first one in chapter 4, and the point is going to be to visualize the siege of Jerusalem, so here we go, chapter 4.

“And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem. ² And put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.

MSH: Now look at what he's asked to do here. It's kind of your evident, it's weird, okay? This isn't the kind of thing you normally do. You might draw a picture of the city of Jerusalem but are you really going to start like, I always think of Legos. Are you really going to start making little models of siege warfare objects then pretend to be attacking this picture you've just created? That's what he's asked to do. Brick here is the typical term for a sun-dried brick which is the most common building material throughout the ancient Near East of the day. So Ezekiel is supposed to take one of these, and ostensibly, before it dries write, trace, engrave, sketch a picture of the city on it. If it wasn't obvious here, it's going to be obvious in chapter 5 around verse 5 that this is what's going to happen to Jerusalem. Take the brick, draw Jerusalem or maybe an outline of the city on it or whatever.

We're not told what level of artistic quality is here. But do this and then do these other things. Now to give you some examples here, I've created a real short PDF. I've put in some images, pictures drawn from some different sources both in print and online for this kind of thing. The idea of a city being engraved on a brick, slab, or even a clay tablet is not unusual. You'll find these in Mesopotamia. I have one or two examples in the PDF. The PDF will be available to you on the webpage for the episode. You can go take a look at how one of these will look like. Use your imagination of what it might look like with Jerusalem. But typically what you don't get is you don't get this kind of siege behavior with the object. This is what Ezekiel's commanded to do. The initial command is maybe even something he's seen before. Draw a city on the brick. I got that. But then to start laying siege to it is what's going to draw attention. That's going to be a little odd or unusual. So he's ordered essentially to make model siege works and array them against the brick and go to war, pretend he's war-gaming here. I have some pictures of Assyrian ones, which I think are the best examples that have been preserved and come down to us.

I threw those into the PDF. But you'll get like huge carts, huge mobile things. If you've seen Lord of the Rings, in some of the battle scenes, you'll have an idea. That's basically what we're dealing with here. But you have these huge contraptions that they would literally push up to a city wall and they were battering rams attached to them and they would compromise a city wall or they would have a ramp that would allow people to get over the wall. All these objects are actually mentioned in chapter 4. There's the siege work, the ramp, the battering ram, the whole

bit. You can look at the PDF for examples that have come down to us archaeologically. There's an excerpt here I want to read to you from the Zondervan Illustrated Bible background commentary. It says this about the siege works.

“The Hebrew word for siege works, *dayeq*, is a cognate of Akkadian *daiqu*, siege wall. The word for building, *sapak*, pour out, building a ramp corresponds to the Akkadian one used in Esarhaddon’s description of his wars: “[I had (my men) pack down] a ramp with earth, wood, and stones.” When the Assyrian king Sennacherib besieged Lachish around 700 BC,”

MSH: This is what it would’ve looked like. It would have been a ramp made of dirt and wood and stones that ramped upward toward the city wall and made it scalable or attackable. In the case of Lachich, the quote continues,

“archaeologists estimate that it took about 25,000 tons of earth and stones to construct the ramp that would've taken 1000 porters 23 days to complete. Sennacherib immortalized this siege on the bas-reliefs in his palace in Nineveh (now in the British Museum). Battering rams are frequently pictured in Assyrian reliefs. The battering ram was made more effective for creating breaches in city walls by tipping it with metal.”

MSH: Your walls would be composed of these clay bricks or wood or something like that. And so you can look at the PDF and see examples of battering rams and how they’re depicted by the Assyrians. It’s kind of obvious what they were used for. This is what Ezekiel’s asked to do. He’s asked to take a brick which isn’t that big and make little miniatures of these siege warfare tactics and array them against the city and pretend like he’s attacking it. And then he’s asked, let’s back up to the passage here in verse 3,

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

MSH: Now the word griddle here is the same kind of thing used in Leviticus, when we went through our series on Leviticus where grain offerings were made. It’s sort of a standard implement used for baking flat cakes over a fire. In this case, it certainly going to be large enough to form of a metal barrier or wall relative to the size of the brick that Ezekiel can illustrate the point. This isn't something that is ultimately going to protect the city. What’s the point of having a brick between Ezekiel and the wall? Ezekiel is going to be sort of the divine actor in the dramatization where God and Ezekiel is going to be told to do this, set his face against city. The point can be kind of simple, that even though you have defenses and maybe the griddle is supposed to also represent shields or something, an army or whatever it is, it ultimately is not going to work. It ultimately is not going to be effective. The walls are going to be breached and Jerusalem is going to be taken. So the fact that you’re going to defend yourselves is really sort of incidental. You're going to lose. Nebuchadnezzar is going to show up, come back and destroy the city. That's just the way it's going to be. Verse 4,

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

MSH: The word here for punishment in these instances is *avon*, which could also be translated iniquity. So you could translate this term, place the iniquity of the house of Israel upon or you shall bear their iniquity. Verse 5,

⁵ For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. ⁶ And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year.

MSH: So he's going to be doing this twice, once on the left, once on the right. Left side is for the house of Israel. The right side is for the house of Judah. So as we talked about in the last episode, when you get the phrases juxtaposed to each other, they're going to be speaking to separate entities, in this case, 390 days for the house of Israel, which would've the northern kingdom and then 40 days for the house of Judah, the southern kingdom. To some, the distinction is going to matter because of the number 390, which will get to here in a moment because that's a difficulty in the passage. Nobody really knows what the number 390 represents here, at least with certainty. So a few observations. Ezekiel is told to lie down on his left side. The assumption is, and later this is going to be made specific in verse 7, the assumption is that he is lying there on his left side facing the brick and the city drawn on the brick. But we're not actually told that here.

If we go to verse 7, which does describe him facing the city and then apply it here then that helps us create the picture. We're not actually told it in this immediate verse. Secondly, the act is designed to communicate the prophet is burying the iniquity or the punishment of the house of Israel. 390 days which we're told corresponds to 390 years of the punishment of the courthouse of Israel. We've talked about how that term is used in relation to house of Judah. What should we think here? The consensus typically is that we could be dealing with, it really depends what you do with the 390. We could be dealing here with both kingdoms, northern and southern. If that's the case, and some people will make that assumption, then the number 390, which corresponds to the house of Israel, some have said we need to understand that separately as northern kingdom because the number 390 we can take from Ezekiel's own time and then we go back 390 years.

That sort of doesn't work out exactly but it sort of chronologically puts you real close to the division of Israel, the division of the monarchy in the north and south. And if you remember the story after the time of Solomon, Solomon dies. Rehoboam and Jeroboam split the country, split the monarchy. This chronology actually misses it by six or seven years so it's not precise. So you can't really argue with certainty that the number 390 represents every year from the time the kingdom split till now. That's the northern apostasy has brought upon punishment on the totality of the Israelites, the totality of the nation. And so that's where the number 390 comes so Ezekiel wants to communicate the message, that even though the northern kingdom is history and scattered to the wind. It still factors into what's going on here in some way, that God is still

recognizing the iniquity, the sinfulness of what happened, what began, what ruined the whole thing way back right after Solomon died. Since it doesn't match up, some will say Solomon probably started to apostatize before the kingdom split because we have these references to him building temples for his wives and whatnot. We lack the chronological information to be any more precise than that. So is that what the 390 means? Is that what house of Israel means, be separated from Judah and then we go with the 390, the 390 helps us to make the decision to separate house of Israel from the general nation of Israel? Could be. You could build a decent argument for that. Block says this though. Block actually goes a different direction. I think what he says is worth mentioning here. He says,

“House of Israel occurs three additional times in this series of sign acts with the following denotations. In verse 3, it has to be the Judeans, verse 13, the Judean exiles in Babylon, and then you have here in 5:4 the survivors of Jerusalem's collapse. Here you have house of Israel referred to three times and it really has to be Judah, so we have a problem here. Minimally therefore house of Israel should at least include the Judeans. Moreover, whereas the name Israel occurs more than 180 times in the book, Judah appears only 15 times. In every instance where Judah is juxtaposed with Israel, the names are used interchangeably. Furthermore, whenever other sign acts involve only “Israel”, the southern kingdom as the remnant of the original enlargement must be in view. Finally, where the northern kingdom is contrasted with Judah, the name Israel is either avoided or defined more particularly. Since Ezekiel uses Israel and Judah interchangeably elsewhere, house of Israel should be understood similarly here.”

MSH: So he says you really don't want to split out into northern and southern kingdom here. He goes a different direction for these reasons. You can make a good argument there as well. He just did. It is coherent. He has good data with it. So then the question asked, what about the 390? If we can't isolate the northern kingdom, then what do we do with it? So Block would say that's exactly the point. You can't do that. The 390 day period can't signify the duration of the exile of the north. What's happening here has to do with not only Jerusalem, which is in the south, but really the whole nation, Israel as a whole. Where does that leave us? What do the numbers mean, because Block makes a good case that we can't just isolate the 390 to the north> Even if you do it, it doesn't work precisely. So what do we do with it? What does the 390 mean? The short answer is nobody really knows for sure. There is no consensus on what the number 390 signifies. I'm going to quote from Greenberg here, and he says this. This is his Ezekiel commentary that gives you sort of a state of the situation.

“Ancient and medieval attempts to interpret the numbers in verses 5 and 5 and the phrase bear the *avon*, punishment or iniquity, within a single frame of reference have not succeeded. Thus, taking *avon* as past iniquity works tolerably in verse 5 counting back from Ezekiel's time, 390 years, brings one to the beginning of the 10th century BC, roughly when the Temple was built, and perhaps that's the start of an era for Ezekiel. This era then was all sinful but this interpretation meets an insuperable difficulty in the

40 years of Judah. For where does one start to work out 40 years only of iniquity for the southern kingdom?"

MSH: His point is that Judah was messed up a lot longer than 40 years. This really isn't working. Back to Greenberg.

"No suggestion persuades and when in the light of the house of Judah, house of Israel is made out to be the northern kingdom alone. The number 390 defies all explanation. Taking *avon* punishment works tolerably well elsewhere for Judah (Ezekiel 29:11-13) The prophet may well have envisaged such a wilderness age of punishment for his wicked compatriots but no effort has succeeded in making a 390 year exile for the northern kingdom plausible. Even counting the last 40 years as running concurrent with that of Judah and therefore, reducing it to 350 years. In addition of the gross discrepancies between these numbers and any historical reality, he says with respect to a single interpretation, verse 9 seems to take account only of a single period of lying on the side that of 390 days."

MSH: What about the 40 of Judah? You can't just use the 40 to pair it down to 350. You can't cheat is what he's saying. This is sort of the situation and Greenberg goes on to comment about in the Septuagint, it has much neater numbers. It has lay on your left side 150 days, the right side of 40, that total is 190 so what's the advantage of that? Well, it would mean that Judah's exile lasted for 40 years, Israel's 150, which is 110 years before that of Judah, which puts you, if you're in 590, roughly for where Ezekiel's living now, go back 110. You have 700 BC which gets you close to the end of the northern kingdom, so on so forth. Basically his conclusion about the Septuagint is it doesn't really help.

It makes it a little more workable but textually, it's probably artificial to begin with and it doesn't really provide anything better. So the conclusion of all that is nobody really knows exactly how to work out the 390. That's another way of saying nobody really knows exactly what Ezekiel was thinking here, what the text is trying to communicate in terms of chronology. And part of the problem is not just the numbers, but is it bearing the punishment or bearing the iniquity? If it's bearing the punishment, it's like you're talking about exile. Bearing the iniquity, that's something else. That refers to the period of sin that preceded the exile. Which is it? Is it one or the other or both? Nobody really knows. So if you're sort of like into numerology or numbers or whatever, maybe you have something better. But in terms of the way scholars have looked at this, there you have it. You can sort of divide them up and kind of get back with the northern kingdom but even if that were like Greenberg says, what are you doing with the 40? Judah was messed up a lot longer than 40 years. This doesn't make any sense, and the exile lasted 70 so 40 doesn't work. Maybe 40 is just a generation. That's nice. What about the 390, because that's not even a multiple of 40. Nobody knows. So let's jump back into verse 7 for the next sign.

⁷ And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared, and you shall prophesy against the city. ⁸ And behold, I will place cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.

MSH: Here we have God placing cords upon him and sort of fixing his position. That's verse 8. Go back to verse 7, set your face toward siege of Jerusalem. This refers to a fixed gauge of hostility or determination. It's kind of a military posture when you have soldiers arrayed and they're ready to charge a city or lay siege to it, this look of determination. To bear the arm is another fighting gesture. For instance, a parallel is Isaiah 52:10,

The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

MSH: The expression to bear the arm means when God bears the arm, God is ready to take action. God is ready to act. And so when it's used here, Ezekiel is sort of a proxy for God in these reenactments. He's the one that visualizes what God is determined to do or is doing to Jerusalem, to the people of Jerusalem. So Ezekiel is the one who bears the arm. It a gesture that says God is going to act and set into motion these other sign acts, the siege of Jerusalem and all that stuff. Verse 9,

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

MSH: Let's just stop. Here you have a good example. If he's lying on his left side and tied up the whole time, how's he supposed to make a meal and eat it? How is he supposed to measure out this and that? How is he supposed to, even if somebody else shaves his head, he's the one who's supposed to do this stuff with it. How does he do this? The answer is he really can't. So it's either these events are gathered together here collectively because they all refer to the siege of Jerusalem when they in fact occurred or were acted out at separate points of time in Ezekiel's actual life and ministry or you have to go with some absurdity. What Block is saying, what we prefaced the episode with, Block discussing sign acts, is he's saying there's nothing in the text that demands a strict chronology here or that they all overlap. I think I would agree that it's probably the best way to handle what you actually see here in the text, how these things would conflict with each other. So verse 10,

¹⁰ And your food that you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day;
from day to day you shall eat it. ¹¹ And water you shall drink by measure,
the sixth part of a hin; from day to day you shall drink.

MSH: We'll stop there. In other words, you can't eat what you want to eat. You can't eat as much as you want. You can't eat to your fill. These are specific rations that would correspond to a situation where someone is in captivity or in exile or a prisoner. It's not much food and water so Ezekiel is told you're going to be doing this. Verse 12,

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

MSH: Now that's the kind of thing, you would use this in ancient Greece and other cultures that would become your fuel source to heat your food and to bake and whatnot. If you're using human dung, it shows you that you're desperate because you don't have domesticated cattle that you can just go get some manure from and dry it out and use it as a fuel source for cooking. You have to use your own. These are prisoner exile desperate circumstances and he's supposed to portray them.

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

MSH: They're not going to have the living situation where they can carefully eat kosher, eat their food and prepare it according to the laws of Torah. Their captors just aren't going to care. It's a totally different situation. So the sign act is to visualize to help those who are watching this conceivable the conditions and the situation which the house of Israel, the people from Jerusalem are going to find themselves.

¹³ And the LORD said, “Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them.” ¹⁴ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth.” ¹⁵ Then he said to me, “See, I assign to you cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread.” ¹⁶ Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. ¹⁷ I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment.

MSH: This is all designed to visually denote desperation, abnormal conditions, conditions brought on by what is going to befall them. They're going to lose their homeland, the city, the temple. They are going to be captive and driven to the land of their enemies. When that happens, life is going to change. That's an understatement but you're not going to have the luxury of not only normal portions to eat and drink, you're not going to have the luxury of even the way you make it. You're going to be desperate. And these acts are supposed to convey the fact that this is what we're looking at. This is what the people of Jerusalem are going to be looking at. This is what's going to happen to them. The people he's talking to have family, relatives, and friends back there. This is going to be horrifying. Verse one in chapter 5 because the hair here is going to denote citizens, inhabitants of Jerusalem. So here a third of them are dying in the city. The city is going to be set to fire. They're going to die. He continues in verse 2,

“² A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city,

MSH: So basically Ezekiel is told to weigh out a third of his hair, sprinkle it around the brick, the city, and then start beating it with a sword, hacking it up. To us it sounds comical but if the people who are watching this understand and they will understand because the text and Ezekiel himself is going to explain it, according to the word of the Lord, they know what this means. A lot of people are going to die in the city when it burns to the ground. Even more of our people are going to die by the sword. They're going to get hacked to death and stabbed to death defending the city. Back to verse 2,

² A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. ³ And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. ⁴ And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.

MSH: So even those who escape the city, because there's going to be some that are brought back to Babylon in the third wave, even some of them are not going to make it. They're going to die, too. Ezekiel's audience when they interpret this, there's a lot of shock value here because if you're back in Jerusalem after the second wave, you have this puppet governor installed. You're thinking this was bad but life returns to normal. The second wave of the captivity happened. The Babylonians are gone. As long as we sort keep all our ducks in a row and we listen to whoever the authority figure is here, we should be okay. Life should go back to normal. The message is no, life isn't going to go back to normal. We're not done here yet. God isn't done yet with you. His anger is not satisfied. Your iniquity has not been punished enough to do the degree to which was committed. We're not done here. So there's going to be some shock value and the circumstances of life are being disrupted. And to dramatize it, to make dramatic, the food rations, the dung, the siege warfare, the whole bit, all these sign acts are designed to frankly freak them out. And that's what's going to happen. I'll throw in a little bit more commentary from Block. Page 192 of his Ezekiel commentary says this.

“Ezekiel’s audience could have interpreted this magically or as a combination of pagan customs but neither seems likely. Three other possibilities exist. First, in the light of strict traditional taboos on priests and Levites shaving themselves in this manner (Lev 21:5, Deut 14:1), they might have understood Ezekiel's performance as repudiation of his priestly status. Indeed, the prophet himself may have been as shocked over this order as it was after the command bread cooked over human excrement. Second possibility was that shaving one's head was also associated with mourning rights. You enter into a period of mourning. Third, to have oneself forcibly shaved by someone else, to have this happen was to experience extreme dishonor and humiliation. That Ezekiel may have shaved himself may have suggested to the onlookers initially this was a sign of grief or self-inflicted disgrace. As the performance progresses, however, it becomes increasingly evident that the razor really functions as

a sword and it was in someone else's hand, and that Ezekiel's shaven appearance symbolizes the impending humiliation of his compatriots who were still in Jerusalem.”

MSH: I think that's well said. Let's go to verse 5 in chapter 5,

⁵“Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. ⁶ And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes. ⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, ⁸ therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. ⁹ And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. ¹⁰ Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds. ¹¹ Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. ¹² A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them.

¹³“Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the LORD—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them. ¹⁴ Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. ¹⁵ You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the LORD; I have spoken— ¹⁶ when I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. ¹⁷ I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”

MSH: That's the end, all the way to the end to chapter 5. This is a dark picture. Nevertheless, you go back to what the initial description was. There will be a little bit hair saved from these thirds. There's not going to be anyone left as far as in the land but there will be people who are taken in exile who will be brought back to the land. There will be a remnant who will be saved

after all of this. Now, to wrap up here, a lot of this is pretty self-explanatory what these acts mean. I want to pull out one item that is not obvious at all that relates to Divine Council stuff. Now, we're used to, if you think of the plagues of Egypt, we're used to associating certain kinds of judgments with judgments on the gods of the people and we even have the destroyer who, if you've read Unseen Realm, I think is the angel of the Lord. So you have a member of God's Council carrying out the death of the firstborn and other judgments in the Old Testament when God solicits or uses the angel of the Lord as his agent of judgment in certain circumstances. There's precedent for this but in this passage, you actually have, to an Israelite, you have to think like an Israelite.

You actually have reference to God using other divine beings, other members of his Council in the role of judgment, in the role of agents of judgment. Where that really hops out or would've hopped out or popped up and become apparent to an Israelite reader is the phrase, deadly arrows of famine. Think about that phrase. It sounds kind of odd. Why would Ezekiel associate arrows with famine? It certainly associates arrows with death, arrows with a siege, arrows with violence but why would you associate arrows with famine? To our ears, and now that I bring it up and you think about it, it just sounds disconnected. It doesn't sound like there's an obvious relationship between these two things. But to an Israelite, there would have been an apparent relationship. The key is specifically a term that I'm going to draw from another passage and you'll see how it relates to this one. The key is a term, actually a name, *resheph*. Now than some of you may be familiar with that being a deity name and that's good. That will help you here. But *resheph* is a term that refers to plague but it is also a deity name, a divine name in ancient Canaan, in Syria Palestine, Syria Canaan in this part of the world. And it shows up in other texts in the Old Testament. I'm going to go back to Deuteronomy 32:23-25 and it says this. This is God foreshadowing these disasters that we've just rehashed in Ezekiel 5. We read in Deuteronomy 32:23-25 this. Now in English, it doesn't sound like much but here are some Hebrew terms I'll throw in.

²³ ““And I will heap disasters upon them;
I will spend my arrows on them;
²⁴ they shall be wasted with hunger *raab*,
and devoured by plague *resheph*
and poisonous pestilence *keteb*;
I will send the teeth of beasts *behemot* against them,
with the venom of things that crawl in the dust.
²⁵ Outdoors the sword shall bereave,
and indoors terror,
for young man and woman alike,
the nursing child with the man of gray hairs.

MSH: Now the key terms here *raab*, famine, *resheph*, plague, and we'll even throw in *keteb*, destruction. In other passages like Habakkuk 3 and Job 5, Psalm 76, there are some others that describe Yahweh coming and judging his people and these names, these things are following behind him. They're like in his retinue. They're in his entourage. Let me just go to Habakkuk 3 to give you a little feel for this. We'll start from the beginning of the chapter.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

² O LORD, I have heard the report of you,
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.
In the midst of the years revive it;
in the midst of the years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy.

³ God came from Teman,
and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah
His splendor covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of his praise.

⁴ His brightness was like the light;
rays flashed from his hand;
and there he veiled his power.

⁵ Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed at his heels.

⁶ He stood and measured the earth;
he looked and shook the nations;
then the eternal mountains were scattered;
the everlasting hills sank low.
His were the everlasting ways.

MSH: So this is a scene of God coming to judge and along with him comes pestilence and plague. There are number these that while these are perfectly acceptable translations, *resheph* and *keteb* and *deber* are actually deity names. They're actually names of divine beings elsewhere. If you have the source like DDD, you could look up the articles and read about them. But here's the point. These passages, especially something like Habakkuk 3 seem to depict that part of God's entourage, members of his Council as it were, are coming with him to be instruments of judgment on whatever the object of judgment is. So to an Israelite, when they read about arrows of famine, they would've thought of *resheph*. Why, because in the ancient Near East, the symbol of *resheph*, believe it or not, was the arrow. It is very strange to our ear but that is indeed the case. You have references to it in certain passages and outside the Bible where plague comes with arrows, that sort of thing. And *resheph*, the deity, one of his emblems was an arrow or arrows.

So I'm just suggesting something to you here that I think if you want to look in the academic commentaries, certainly with Habakkuk 3, you're going to get discussion of Yahweh's retinue or entourage, God using other members of the Divine Council besides the angel of the Lord, that's typically the agent of judgment. But sometimes you have these other terms and since their divine name terms in the culture, the idea is that God uses divine agents to help him punish and destroy. So not only do we see the Council in passages like Daniel 4, Daniel 7, judge the fate of God's enemies, 1 Kings 22 with Ahab, you get those. But you also get instances where, apparently, and the angel of the Lord is the most obvious one, but you get examples like these where apparently this was the conception, that God will also use his Council to punish, to exact judgment, and not just on his enemies. Sometimes the object is his own people. So I just wanted to leave you with that thought.

For our purposes here just sticking to Ezekiel and not really rabbit trailing back in the Divine Council stuff, for our purposes here, the point is that in chapters 4 and 5 we have a litany, we have a whole list of nine sign acts aimed at Jerusalem, at the people of God, and the messaging could not have been more clear. If you remember a bit of what God told Ezekiel in the last episode in chapters 2 and 3, he's saying you're responsibility is to tell these people what's coming and if you don't, they're accountable for their own sin. But if you don't tell them, then their blood I'm going to require are on your hands. Then you're going to be candidates for punishment, too. You need to tell them what's coming, whether they repent or not. This is your job. This is your task. And someone who's reading the book really, as bad as the message is, you could be an Israelite. You could be one of the exiles there by the river thinking we thought at least our friends and family would be okay. Maybe we'd return some time. Maybe known we just draw the short straw but it's worse than that. This is going to happen to all of us. And you could listen to this and think I'm here. I'm alive. I'm not back there probably getting killed and maybe I should listen to the prophet and repent because my sins contributed to this whole set of conditions.

Maybe I should do that. Maybe I should repent and Lord willing, I will be among those who actually survive in the long term. That's what you would hope people would think. But God has been pretty transparent. You might as well go to a nation that doesn't even speak your language. You're going to get better results. But still, there could be, there's a message of hope here, too, that if you're an Israelite that has a conscience, it's like I want to be in the remnant. I'm going to repent. We're here. This is our circumstances now. It's not going to get any better but perhaps God will look at me, you look upon me and see that my change in heart, and I'm going to align myself to him and I can be part of the remnant. That would be the goal, the positive thing that would come out of all this. We're going to see as we precede in the book that that kind of response unfortunately is pretty rare. Maybe not as rare as Jeremiah. Jeremiah's famous for having only one convert, Baruch. It might not be as bad as that but it's not a whole lot better. So Ezekiel is just going to keep blasting away and when he speaks, when he shows up out of his house, people know, and after this list of nine, they're going to expect it's just going to be more of the same. It's going to be more bad news. If you remember the introduction of the book, it is going to be more of this until the city is actually destroyed in real time and then you're going to see a shift and the people are going to know that, too, and they're going to look back and to know there's going to be a remnant. So it's not all dark. There is some hope. But Ezekiel's given it to them both barrels here and that's going to continue as we keep going through the book.

TS: What are your thoughts on Ezekiel 5:13 and just the whole dark side of God?

MSH: I don't think we have any rational reason to think that God couldn't or shouldn't be dark, in other words, that he couldn't or shouldn't be angry at rebellion. I'm not attributing this to you but, and if I did, I'd have to attribute it to me as well. We think of sin as mistakes. Scripture quite frequently, not always but for the most part, thinks of them as rebellion, and depending on what the rebellion is as we talked about in Ezekiel, there was plenty of grace offered to the Israelite when they did things unwittingly or unknowingly. Most of the system was really about ritual preparedness and approaching God because God wants to be approached. God wants a

relationship. But then you would have instances of rebellion that are committed here without regard to what God thinks or wants.

It's an issue of severity and there would be no sacrifice for sin for these things. If you're going to do these things and if you're going to deliberately turn your back on God as it were, I don't think it's unreasonable that God would be angry. So the fact that God gets angry and often is quite angry, to me, isn't a shocking thing or an inconsistent thing. He's telling you that this is the way I will react so yeah, take that as a warning. I'm telling you ahead of time. You go back into the Torah, here, we're at Ezekiel. We're entering into the exilic period. But way back in the Torah, God had said if you worship other gods, if you do these things, go back to Deuteronomy and read the list of curses. Deuteronomy 26 and 29 you get the list of blessings and curses. They had plenty of notice and heads up that if you do these things, since I'm tying your presence in the land to your loyalty to me in terms of your worship, this is going to be the result. You will be scattered to the wind.

I will make you a harlot. A lot of this language in Ezekiel 5 is drawn out of and you can find in those cursing's passages in Deuteronomy. Nobody can claim like they didn't know or they were surprised or this is really inconsistent. This is high-handed rebellion and that's what God is reacting to. He's not reacting to know I forgot to do this or that. So I think we need to understand the process the way God reacts here and what God does is we need to not process Israel's state, they didn't get to this point by just making innocent mistakes. They got to this point by deliberate intent and rebellion. So that to me is one part of it. To the other part, it's up to God, God gets to decide when he is going to act out, what we think of as the dark side and legitimately it is. God gets to decide when his patience is up and he will decide that and eh does. If you really think about it, if you're really honest with yourself, it's another high-handed act to tell God that he can't do that or he's being inconsistent or shame on you God for acting this or that way. Who are we to make such judgments of God, especially when he's given them all the heads up they really need.

You said they get to see all these miraculous things. Well, they are quite a bit removed from the days of Moses and whatnot, but even if they had heard about them consistently, I would suggest that we hear about supernatural things all the time, too. We can read about them in Scripture. I'm a supernaturalist. When people tell me that the Lord appeared to this Muslim guy in Turkey and said knock it off. I'm Jesus and you're going to follow me and start a church and he does and look what happens, a huge massive movement growth of the church in these Islamic countries. That's a supernatural thing that God's does. My life experience, even though I wasn't over there, my life experience still includes reports of divine activity. It might be a guardian angel. It might be something that you have a friend or yourself that something specifically happened to you. This is like the will of God. How do you know it's the will of God unless it's happening to you? I get that but there are people we have relationships with that they have no reason to lie to us.

They tell us things that happen to them where it's very clear that there's really not a better explanation other than God did that. Does that help us not sin? Maybe, but for a lot of Christians, we get exposed to these things and really never even pay attention to them and we go on our merry way and do what we want. So I understand why you asked it but I don't think seeing and witnessing and hearing about the great things God did in Israel, that's not a necessary deterrent from their apostasy anymore that it's a necessary deterrent to our own apostasy.

