



# A Spiritual Spectacle

## (Ezekiel 4-7)

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Ezekiel #2 | Apr 21, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 | Preached by Steve H

### *Pre-Opening*



**Go onto stage, lie down on left side, and start building a battle scene out of Legos® (or similar figurines) on a base plate. Include a post-it note with our town name written on it, attached to a central building that is being attacked.**

**Nothing is spoken for over a minute while building and playing.**

**Finally, look up and begin...**

### *Opening*

Did I get your attention? Most of you are not quite sure what I'm doing unless you've read ahead in Ezekiel. If it wasn't awkward to do during a sermon, maybe you would come up here and look more closely at my scene.

- You would notice the sticky note I have on it (it says "Tonganoxie")...
- You would notice the figures I was putting on there. They all are equipped for battle, wielding weapons...
- You would notice my posture on the ground, which side I was laying on...

And then you would wonder, "Has Steve lost his mind?"

**[Stand up and move to podium]**

Based on everything I know so far, no! No, I haven't lost my mind.

I'm simply taking the opportunity to introduce you to one of the strange prophetic messages you'll find in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel.

### *Sign Acts*

As we discussed last week when introducing this series, Ezekiel is a prophet of God. That means his job is to *receive and declare* messages from the Lord. When we think about Biblical prophets, often we think about **verbal declaration** in the form of **preaching** or about **written declaration** in the form of **Bible passages**. Those two categories are

primary and certainly true. Yet, sometimes God asked the prophets to be a bit more...theatrical...in their presentation.



These dramatic presentations are known as “sign-acts” (e.g. a “sign” presented through action), and they are found throughout Scripture. God asks Jeremiah to wear a physical yoke like a farm animal; God asks Isaiah to wear nothing at all! The action could be as small as smashing a piece of pottery (Jeremiah) or as big as a marriage to a prostitute (Hosea). Sign-acts are a tool of communication – they create “compelling, multi-sensory presentations”<sup>1</sup> that highlight and enhance the declaration of God’s Word.

And few prophets use them as effectively as Ezekiel!



In our nine-week overview of this book, we won’t be able to cover all the sign-acts Ezekiel is commanded to perform. His repertoire of enacted prophecies included lying bound in ropes (4:1-8), shaving his head and striking some of the hair with a sword (5:1-2), covering his face and digging through a wall (12:3-7), physically trembling (12:18), and avoiding the full mourning rituals for his dead wife (24:16-24).<sup>2</sup> However, as we look at chapters 4-7 today, we find a collection of actions front and center that demand our attention.

After last week’s opening, dramatic vision of God’s glory that Ezekiel witnessed while he was on the banks of the Kebar River in ancient Babylon, now Ezekiel must **listen to the voice of God** and be His mouthpiece to share with the Jewish people living in exile.

I’m excited for you to see his presentations, but make sure you catch God’s message while you watch. We’ll spend some time on the details here, but I promise there is practical application when we get to the end!



## ***Signs of the Siege (Ezekiel 4-5)***

On one level, through his various attention-grabbing actions, Ezekiel is presenting a message predicting the coming siege of the city of Jerusalem.

*Note: Remember the history we discussed last week? Babylon is going to destroy Jerusalem in about six years. These messages point to King Nebuchadnezzar’s siege and conquest of Jerusalem.*

What does God have Ezekiel share? Let’s take a tour of his communication plan.



### ***The Brick (4:1-3)***

The first two sign-acts are what I was demonstrating (with a modern twist) as we opened the sermon.

<sup>1</sup> [Sign Acts: The Weird, Wonderful World of Prophetic Communication \(bibleproject.com\)](http://bibleproject.com)

<sup>2</sup> McGregor, L. J. (1994). [Ezekiel](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 716). Inter-Varsity Press.

*“And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem. 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. 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.” (Ezekiel 4:1–3, ESV)*

Ezekiel sets up a little scene – likely in front of his house, in view of the neighbors (see 3:24-25) – where he can act out the siege of Jerusalem with armies surrounding it and attempting to breach the defensive walls. The iron plate shows that God won’t intervene in what is happening.

It looks like playing with toys, like something I would do with my GI Joe figures growing up (or with Legos® this morning). But this is Ezekiel’s constant assignment, day in and day out, *pre-enacting* the scene that is coming in just a few short years.

### *Lying Down (4:4-8)*

Ezekiel’s posture while he attacks “Brick Jerusalem” is attention-getting as well. He doesn’t just sit there. Instead, he is to do this while lying on the ground! God commands him to lie on his left side for 390 days (13 months) and on his right side for another 40 days. Each day represents a year that the nations of Israel and Judah, respectively, have rejected God.

Not only is he on the ground...he is bound with ropes! It adds another layer to the visual image that would stick in the head of those who passed by. It also would be extremely uncomfortable!

So, Ezekiel’s activities are restricted. He’s not going to work; he’s not running to the bank. But at least he’ll get the chance to eat some good snacks while doing this, right?

### *The Worst Bread Ever (4:9-17)*

Wrong.

*“Now go and get some wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and emmer wheat, and mix them together in a storage jar. Use them to make bread for yourself during the 390 days you will be lying on your side. Ration this out to yourself, eight ounces of food for each day, and eat it at set times. Then measure out a jar of water for each day, and drink it at set times. Prepare and eat this food as you would barley cakes. While all the people are watching, bake it over a fire using dried human dung as fuel and then eat the bread.” (Ezekiel 4:9–12, NLT)*

So, all day...laying down...playing war with a brick...eating a meager ration of multi-grain, cooked-over-human-poop bread.

*Note: I don’t think the makers of “Ezekiel 4:9” bread read down to verse 12!*



Ezekiel took all this weirdness in stride, but that last detail was a little much even for him! He protests to God because he does not want to eat something that violates the priestly dietary laws. So, God extends a small dose of mercy – Ezekiel can use cow patties instead of human dung – but the rest of the command remains intact.

The strict diet mirrors the eating conditions of a city surrounded and trapped by war.

*Note: You've heard about some of the conditions in the Gaza strip right now while Israel is at war with Hamas. This is similar, except without aid deliveries being flown in.*

## The Hair (5:1-17)



On top of the humiliating acts we've just discussed, God also commands Ezekiel to get a haircut. Ezekiel is to cut off his hair and beard using a sharp sword. Doing so would leave him bald and defiled, since baldness was not a sign of "intense beauty" like it is today. [wink, wink]

The haircut was a pagan sign of mourning for the dead, and it was something a priest should normally not be doing. But the haircut was just the first part; Ezekiel's treatment of that same hair he cut would also be a sign.



*"Place a third of it at the center of your map of Jerusalem. After acting out the siege, burn it there. Scatter another third across your map and chop it with a sword. Scatter the last third to the wind, for I will scatter my people with the sword. Keep just a bit of the hair and tie it up in your robe. Then take some of these hairs out and throw them into the fire, burning them up. A fire will then spread from this remnant and destroy all of Israel." (Ezekiel 5:2-4, NLT)*

The people of Jerusalem would face fire, violence, scattering, and more. God would preserve a remnant, but the rest would face dire consequences.

Such were the signs of the siege.



How effective were these sign acts? To answer that question, let me ask you a question: **How many of you are familiar with the guy in Lawrence who pushes around the baby doll in a stroller?** (Dennis) You've seen him wandering on Mass St., pushing a stroller, sometimes with a mannequin, right?

The fact that we know *this* local guy (including his name) tells me that Ezekiel's antics were effective. Small actions can get your attention! Weird stuff, even on a small scale like what we would see as we walk down the street, can stick in your head. It can prompt conversation. It can stir up questions.

- *"Who's that guy over there? Why is he on the ground?"*
- *"Did you see what he was eating? Did you smell what he was cooking?"*
- *"Why does he have that terrible haircut today?...He used what?"*
- *"What is his deal?"*



Ezekiel's sign-acts weren't nationally televised; they weren't internationally known. But they built a reputation among the people who saw him. Every day he made an impact on the exiles as they walked home from work. When they would pass by Ezekiel's house and see his actions, they would start to pick up that he was communicating a message, a message supposedly from God.



## ***“Thus Says the Lord” (Ezekiel 5-7)***

The method of presentation was weird; the content of the message was disturbing: Utter destruction of the chosen people in Jerusalem. Why was God doing this? *Why?!*



“Why” is usually our question as well. Anybody here ever ask God, “Why?” That question comes up whenever we face personal tragedies (financial disasters, health issues, car troubles). It happens when we face collective tragedies (stock market crashes, wars, tornadoes, floods).

“Why” is the question I hear often when I'm providing pastoral counseling. It is the question I ask when I *need* pastoral counseling. It is the question I hear from teenage boys and middle-aged moms and octogenarian widowers. It is the question that bounces around in our minds and spills out our lips.

Why? Why does God allow these tragedies? Why does God permit evil people to hurt me? Why doesn't He rescue me from these ailments yet? Why am I suffering?

We rarely get a direct answer. Sorry. I wish that I could give you an answer. I can't... but, I can get you at least one step closer, thanks to Ezekiel.



The great thing about the prophetic books in the Bible is that, here in them, *we do* get an answer! In the prophets, God shares His own messages – they aren't about Him, they are from Him. So, we get a glimpse of God's heart, of His motivation and His will. We usually don't hear such things in the books of history or the letters, but we get them in the prophets. We get “thus says the Lord” statements that speak of His heart and His intentions and His purposes!

If we can get an answer to “*why*” in those situations, it may help us feel better when we want to ask Him “*why*” in ours.

## ***Why Jerusalem?***



So, what are God's reasons in Ezekiel? Why is He proclaiming destruction and doom? Well, in the midst of the sign-act of Ezekiel's haircut, God gives an explanation.

*“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is an illustration of what will happen to Jerusalem. I placed her at the center of the nations, but she has rebelled against my regulations and decrees and has been even more wicked than the surrounding nations. She has refused to obey the regulations and decrees I gave her to follow.*”

*“Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: You people have behaved worse than your neighbors and have refused to obey my decrees and regulations. You have not even lived up to the standards of the nations around you. Therefore, I myself, the Sovereign LORD, am now your enemy. I will punish you publicly while all the nations watch. Because of your detestable idols, I will punish you like I have never punished anyone before or ever will again. Parents will eat their own children, and children will eat their parents. I will punish you and scatter to the winds the few who survive.*

*“As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, I will cut you off completely. I will show you no pity at all because you have defiled my Temple with your vile images and detestable sins.” (Ezekiel 5:5–11, NLT)*

Rebellion. Wickedness. Idolatry. Sin.

The Jews’ behavior had invited judgement. Sin had infected every area of their world.

In **Ezekiel 5**, God puts forth this motivation for His actions. In the next two chapters, God repeats and expands His condemnation of these behaviors.

In **chapter six**, he has Ezekiel shout to the mountains, speaking against them (but really against the people who have sinned on them). He condemns their idol worship and states His plans to punish.

In **chapter seven**, Ezekiel proclaims disaster in frank and shocking terms. The language is almost offensive as God points out the depravity that has earned His judgment. As He rebukes, we hear repeated phrases: “The end!” “It comes!” “Disaster/Doom!”

## *We See What Offends God!*

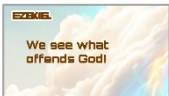
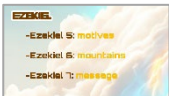
In these statements of calamity, we see what offends God. We discover behaviors that violate His character...and that invite disaster. He sees blatant disregard for his rules and commands, and He responds with intensity. If you had any doubts about His sincerity regarding those rules and commands, now you don’t!

Condemnation of sin is part of God’s prerogative. He is a perfect judge, and justice requires punishment. He doesn’t let things slide forever; at some point there is consequence for our actions against Him.

*“God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”*

(Acts 17:30–31, NLT)

Sin will be judged...sometimes in our lives. That is part of the “why” in Ezekiel. And if we are being honest, that may be part of the why in our own lives. There may be sin that



God needs to purify out of our lives, our routines, our habits, our reactions, and our choices. That may be part of the why...but it is not all of the “why!”

There is more revealed in Ezekiel that helps us see God’s heart in His judgment.



## ***“Then they will know...”***

It is about people knowing God!!! Look at Ezekiel 7:4.

*“I will turn my eyes away and show no pity. I will repay you for all your detestable sins. Then **you will know that I am the LORD.**” (Ezekiel 7:4, NLT)*

*“Then you will know that I am the Lord.”* That recognition formula is repeated in 6:7; 6:10; 6:13; 6:14, 7:9, and 7:26. It isn’t just a throwaway line; it is an intentionally repeated statement of purpose!

My personal assumption is often that the warning of God (or any source of authority) is just to stop me from facing bad consequences.

- Do not speed...so I don’t get a ticket.
- Do not steal...so I don’t face jail time.
- Do not leave your clothes in a pile on the floor...so I don’t get “lovingly encouraged.”
- Do not worship idols...so I don’t get punished by God.

However, there is always a deeper reason beyond avoiding punishment:

- Do not speed...so we are safer and so that others are protected.
- Do not steal...so others will have what they need, and so we honor each other’s rights.
- Do not leave your clothes in a pile on the floor...so we can have a neat, peaceful house and we can have clean clothes to wear.
- Do not worship idols....so we can know the true, living God instead of trusting powerless items.

God here reveals His “why” here in Ezekiel. It is not a prediction so God can say “I told you so!” It is not a prophecy so people can know and avoid danger. It is an undeniable action so “we will know that He is the Lord!”



## ***We See What Matters to God!***

We see what matters to God! Listen to this explanation:

*In every generation God’s judgment and discipline is misunderstood by most people. God’s chief desire is to bring people to himself or back to himself. When mankind willfully refuses to turn to him, God mercifully uses discipline and*

*judgment to cause the people to recognize that he is the only true God, always faithful to what he has said in his word!*<sup>3</sup>

God wants to know us, and He wants us to know Him.

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV)

**He wants to know us:** "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shined in our hearts to give the light of **the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**" (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV)

"But if anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (1 Corinthians 8:3, ESV)

**He wants us to know Him:** "But if anyone loves God, he is **known by God.**" (1 Corinthians 8:3, ESV)

Sometimes God allows those difficult circumstances to overtake us because we refuse to listen until He acts. *Warning* after *warning* might fail to get our attention. It is only the *punishment* that slows us down long enough to realize our failure and to see that we've missed HIM!

But, either way, God is working to make sure we know Him! That is the "why!" We can either know God through his word and commands and promises...or we can know God through His actions and judgment.



## *Motivation for Mercy*

And the knowledge and presence of God is the best thing you can have in your life!

Do you believe that?

The knowledge and presence of God is the best thing you can have in your life!

If you care about the people around you, you will want them to have the best thing, too. God is **not limited** like a steak, or a car, or a pair of shoes – if you wanted others to share what you had in those cases, you'd be left with an empty plate, an empty garage, or bare feet. No, the **knowledge of God isn't limited**. It's like the sun – if you get a perfect day with the sun shining, you can invite as many people as possible to join you outside. They can ALL equally enjoy the sun!

And everyone can share the knowledge and presence of the Son of God, too!

God's motivation in Ezekiel is the same motivation we need with others. If they are missing out on the knowledge of God by forgetting, rejecting, mistaking, or neglecting Him, then we need to help them remember. The New Testament book of Jude gives us some guidance:

"And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do not forget those who are still unbelieving." (Jude 22-25, NIV)

*"And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do not forget those who are still unbelieving."*

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, R. H. (1986). Ezekiel. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel* (Vol. 6, p. 775). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



*so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.”*  
(Jude 22–23, NLT)

Sometimes it is messy when you try to bring people back. Sometimes it takes a tough conversation, or years of prayer. Sometimes, it means you must cautiously endure some dirt (unsavory language or behavior).

But just like God told Ezekiel “I want them to know me,” God makes it clear to us that He *still* wants people to know him.

## ***Closing***



God’s assignment for Ezekiel shows how much He wants people to understand. He pulled out all the stops to get the message to His people, using sign-acts and statements to show what mattered most.

The brick, the lying down, the gross bread, the haircut, the harsh messages...they were attempts to help people KNOW GOD.

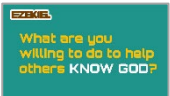
So was the content. The prophecies, the judgment, the destruction...they, too, were attempts to help people KNOW GOD.

Today, God will continue to take steps to get the attention of people. He will allow difficulties and hardships and sickness to help people see that they can’t do it alone – that they need Him. That they need to KNOW HIM.

But He also asks us to be part of the plan.

So, what are *you* willing to do to help your friends, family, neighbors and coworkers KNOW HIM?

Don’t copy Ezekiel’s methods... but do copy his willingness to do whatever it takes to help people discover and know Jesus!



## ***Prayer***

### ***Invitation***

You and I need to know God. We need Him, plain and simple. So, as you consider the words of Ezekiel and the motives of God, let the words of the following song be your prayer.

## ***PRAYER REQUESTS***

# Notes

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## ***Signs of the Siege (Ezekiel 4-5)***

*The Brick (4:1-3)*

*Lying Down (4:4-8)*

*The Worst Bread Ever (4:9-17)*

*The Hair (5:1-17)*

## ***“Thus Says the Lord” (Ezekiel 5-7)***

*Why Jerusalem?*

*We See What Offends God! (Acts 17:30-31)*

## ***“Then they will know...”***

*We See What Matters to God! (2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 8:3)*

*Motivation for Mercy (Jude 22-23)*

# Discussion Questions

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*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- Describe a time when you had to look ridiculous in front of others. What did you do? Why were you compelled to do it?
- Would you do it again?

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- What are some visual “signs” that God has used to communicate to people in the Bible? Why use visuals instead of just using words?
- Look at Ezekiel 4-5. What visual “sign-acts” was Ezekiel commanded to perform?
- Which sign-act would be most effective at getting attention? Why?
- Which sign-act would be most difficult to perform? Why?
- If you saw Ezekiel performing these on the street in downtown Tonganoxie today, what would be your reaction? Do you think the Jews reacted any differently?
- Read Ezekiel 5:5-11. What is the reason for the coming judgment on Jerusalem?
- How would you feel if God described Himself as “your enemy”? Explain.
- Look over chapters 6-7. How many times do you find the phrase “then you will know that I am the Lord”? What does that tell you about God’s objective?
- Does pain and suffering draw you closer to God or drive you further away? Why do you think God uses these punishments to get the Jews’ attention?
- How can you help others to “know God,” especially those who are on the fringe? (see Jude 22-23).

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Ask God to help you know Him better than you do today. Pray for an awareness of His presence as you go through your day.