

Ezekiel 4:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

Analysis

For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. God specifies the duration and meaning of Ezekiel's suffering—390 days representing years of Israel's accumulated guilt. The formula "each day for a year" (yom la-shanah, יֹמֶן לְשָׁנָה) appears elsewhere in Scripture (Numbers 14:34), establishing prophetic time symbolism where literal days represent extended periods.

The 390 years likely span from the divided kingdom (931 BC when Jeroboam led Israel's rebellion) through the exile period, though exact calculation remains debated among scholars. The key theological point transcends precise chronology: Israel's sin wasn't momentary lapse but sustained, generational rebellion requiring proportionate judgment. The Hebrew *avon* (עֹבֵן, "iniquity") denotes guilt and punishment together—sin carries intrinsic consequences.

This verse reveals divine bookkeeping—God counts every year of covenant unfaithfulness. Sin accumulates, and accumulated sin demands comprehensive judgment. Yet even here, grace appears: God limits the period of bearing iniquity rather than decreeing permanent judgment. This anticipates the gospel truth that Christ bore a definite, sufficient penalty for sin (Hebrews 10:12-14), not eternal, ongoing punishment. His finished work fully satisfied divine justice.

Historical Context

The northern kingdom of Israel persisted in idolatry throughout its existence (931-722 BC), with every king described as doing evil and perpetuating Jeroboam's sin of establishing golden calf worship at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:25-33). Despite prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea, Israel refused to repent, leading to Assyrian conquest and exile.

Even after Israel's fall, their guilt remained unresolved. The ten northern tribes disappeared into Assyrian captivity, their destiny uncertain. Ezekiel, ministering 130+ years after Israel's exile, still addresses their accumulated iniquity, showing that sin's consequences persist across generations until properly addressed through repentance and divine forgiveness.

The exiles in Babylon needed to understand their current suffering within this broader historical context. Their captivity wasn't isolated event but culmination of centuries of covenant violations by both Israel and Judah. Only recognizing the depth and duration of their corporate sin could produce the thorough repentance necessary for restoration.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the accumulation of sin over generations teach us about corporate responsibility and consequences?
2. What does God's precise accounting of Israel's years of iniquity reveal about His justice and memory?
3. How does Christ bearing our sins 'once for all' (Hebrews 10:10) contrast with Ezekiel's temporary symbolic bearing?

Interlinear Text

וְנִתְתִּיתִ לְךָ יְמִינְךָ	אַתָּה	לְבָנֶיךָ	שָׁנִים	עַל-	עַל-
H589	For I have laid	H0	H853	upon thee the years	of their iniquity
H5414			H8141		H5771
לְמִסְפֵּר	וּמִתְשַׁעַם	מֵאוֹת	שָׁלֹשׁ	וּמִ	
according to the number	days	three	hundred	and ninety	days
H4557	H3117	H7969	H3967	H8673	H3117
וְנִשְׁאַלְתָּ	עַל-	בֵּית	וְנִשְׁאַלְתָּ		
so shalt thou bear	of their iniquity	of the house	of Israel		
H5375	H5771	H1004	H3478		

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 14:34 (Parallel theme): After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

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