

Ezekiel 4:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

Analysis

And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. After bearing Israel's 390 years of iniquity, Ezekiel must lie on his right side for 40 days representing Judah's guilt. The right side may symbolize Judah's southern location or greater privilege as keeper of Jerusalem and the Davidic throne. The 40 years likely span from Josiah's reforms (circa 628 BC) to Jerusalem's fall (586 BC), though interpretations vary.

The asymmetry is striking: Israel receives 390 years of judgment; Judah only 40. This reflects Judah's shorter history of idolatry in its final form—though both kingdoms sinned, Judah experienced periods of reformation under kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, while Israel consistently rebelled. Yet even Judah's comparatively brief period of accumulated guilt warranted devastating judgment, demonstrating that sin's seriousness isn't measured solely by duration.

The phrase "I have appointed thee" (natati lekha, נָתַתִּי לך) emphasizes divine sovereignty—God determines both the sin's period and the judgment's duration. This refutes human bargaining or minimizing of sin. God alone calculates guilt's weight and punishment's measure. The specificity of days and years reveals God's perfect justice—neither arbitrary nor excessive, His judgments precisely correspond to sin's reality.

Historical Context

Judah's final 40 years (approximately 628-586 BC) witnessed dramatic spiritual oscillation. Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22-23) temporarily restored covenant faithfulness, including destroying high places, purging idolatry, and reinstituting Passover. However, Josiah's death in 609 BC triggered rapid apostasy under his sons Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.

Archaeological evidence confirms this period's turbulence. Numerous lmlk ("belonging to the king") seal impressions from Josiah's reign show administrative reorganization. Yet cultic sites excavated at locations like Arad reveal that high places, though officially suppressed, persisted in popular practice. The people's hearts remained attached to syncretistic worship despite official reforms.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel's contemporary, repeatedly warned that Josiah's reforms were superficial—"Judah has not turned to me with her whole heart, but only in pretense" (Jeremiah 3:10). Within decades, this proved tragically true. The 40 years of Judah's final guilt thus represent not merely overt idolatry but hypocritical religiosity—maintaining temple worship while pursuing forbidden practices. Such duplicity warranted the same judgment as Israel's blatant apostasy.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the difference between Israel's 390 years and Judah's 40 years illustrate varying degrees of guilt and privilege?
2. What does Judah's rapid descent from Josiah's reforms to Babylonian exile teach about superficial versus genuine repentance?
3. In what ways might contemporary Christianity mirror Judah's pattern of outward religiosity masking heart-level idolatry?

Interlinear Text

וְכָלִית							צָדָב	עַל	וְשָׁכַבְתָּ	אַתָּה	אֶת	לָהּ	אֶת	וְכָלִית		
And when thou hast accomplished							side	on							side	
H3615							H5921								H6654	
H3227	again		and thou shalt bear		H853	the iniquity										H3063
H8145			H5375		H5771											
forty	days	days	for a year		days	for a year		I have appointed								H0
H705	H3117	H3117	H8141		H3117	H8141		H5414								
לְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה	וְשָׁנָה		

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.

Revelation 13:5 (Parallel theme): And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.