

# **Ezekiel's Time on His Side**

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**A discussion of Ezekiel 4**

**From the Class:**

**Readings in Classical Prophecy**

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### **Introduction**

Ezekiel chapter four records the account of the 'son of man' being commanded by God to lay on his left side for 390 days and then to lay on his right side for 40 days in order to represent the years of iniquity by the house of Israel and the house of Judah and to bear their sin for these periods. There has been much debate as to what period(s) these numbers refer to. Some consider the periods to be subsequent while others say they overlap. Some see them as representing years in the history of Israel and Judah, others see them as symbolic of the days of the two-phased siege of Jerusalem. Still others see the numbers as having been altered by later editors and that the Old Greek (LXX) text is correct here and contains the original numbers. To this later idea I turn my attention first.

### **Textual variants**

The Septuagint (LXX), which represents an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, reads 190 in place of 390 in verses 5 and 9. The LXX also introduces the number 150 in verse 4. This according to Klein is to make the numbers refer to the length of years of the punishment of Israel and Judah rather than to the years during which they sinned (p 42). Thus the house of Israel began its punishment around 735 BC (actually a little later) with the earliest Assyrian deportations and lasted 150 years until the destruction of the temple in 586 BC and the deportation of Judah who joined Israel in Exile and whose punishment was predicted to last another 40 years, thus 190 total. The problem with this is that by the time the Greek translation of Ezekiel was made, everyone knew that Judah's exile lasted 70 years and the prophecies concerning such by Jeremiah were already well published, so it seems illogical that the translators would have changed the 390 reading to 190 and introduced 150 in verse 4 in order to make the account relate to the combined exilic periods.

It has been suggested that the similarity of the LXX 150 and 40 to flood account of the 150 days of the waters prevailing on the earth after the 40 days and nights of rain is more than coincidental.

### **The sign-action**

There exists a debate as to whether Ezekiel merely narrated the sign of laying on his left and right sides or whether he actually performed the action (or lack thereof). Such sign actions exist in the scriptures from the earliest periods through the post-exilic period. One of the earliest accounts of a sign-action is that of God's leading Abraham outside to try to count the stars in order to indicate to him the large number of his descendants (Gen. 15:5). Later Ahijah of Shiloh takes the new cloak he is wearing and tears it into 12 pieces and tells Jeroboam to take 10 of the pieces indicating the breakaway kingdom of Israel that would consist of 10 of the original 12 tribes (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 11:29-31). Later prophets such as Hoshea also perform actions that are prophetic signs such as his marrying the harlot (Hoshea chap. 1). After the Babylonian exile the prophet Zechariah is told to place a crown on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest to indicate the uniting of the priesthood and royal line (Zechariah 6:11-13). Walther Zimmerli gives the opinion that the "accomplishment (of the sign-action) is essential to a true sign-action... A sign-action which was not actually performed but only narrated must be regarded as a late and weakened form." (Zimmerli p156). Clearly the text implies (as Ralph Klein noted, p41) that Ezekiel had an audience that observed his actions. If Ezekiel merely told the audience what God had instructed him, and did not actually carry out the instructions, the force of his message would be greatly weakened which is exactly opposite the desired effect. The author of this passage wants the reader to believe that Ezekiel did indeed carry out the actions that comprised the sign.

### **Non-stop on his side?**

Verse 8 cannot be understood to mean that Ezekiel lay on his left side for 390 days without moving or getting up at all, for it is very unlikely that he would be able to

have the water and food mentioned in verse 9 and following as well as the fuel to cook the food within arm's reach. Clearly he would have had to gather together these three items on a periodic basis, for the text seems to imply that he himself gathered them and not someone else. The food preparation alone would seem to require greater mobility than that which is indicated by his being restrained such that he was unable to turn over.

Adam Clarke stated that Ezekiel was lying on a couch to which he is chained, but it is unclear where Clarke got the idea of the couch (Clarke p848).

Zimmerli pointed out that if one considers that the direction of orientation in the Ancient Middle East was towards the rising of the sun (as opposed to the North pole today), then a person facing the east would have the north on his left and the south on his right. Thus it appears to be significant that when Ezekiel lay on his left side it was to represent the northern kingdom and when he laid on his right side it represented the southern kingdom. As Greenberg pointed out, the use of right and left to mean south and north or at least the idea of an easterly orientation is shown plainly at Ezekiel 16:46 where Samaria is on Jerusalem's left and Sodom is on Jerusalem's right. The translator's of both the NKJV and the NAS actually translate the Hebrew words for right and left in this passage as south and north. (Some scholars believe that based on this easterly orientation the nation of Yemen received its name, for to a person standing in Israel or a neighboring country and facing east, Yemen, which means 'right', would be to his right.)

#### **“Israel” – the ten tribes or the whole people of Israel/Judah**

It is important to understand what the term 'Israel' refers to in order to better understand the prophecy of the 390 days. Two possibilities are obvious. The first is that it refers to all 12 tribes, the descendants of one man – Israel (Jacob). The second possibility is that it refers to the northern kingdom of the ten tribes that broke away from the house of David. Both uses are well attested in scripture. To determine its use here, both the context and the author's typical use must be examined.

Zimmerli points out (p163) that in the book of Ezekiel up until this prophecy the

term “Israel” has referred to “the whole people of Israel, which was represented in Ezekiel’s day by Judah, forming the remnant of Israel with Jerusalem as its sacred center”. Klein states, “it is most unusual for Ezekiel to refer to the northern kingdom as the ‘house of Israel’” (p42) Klein, however, notes the exceptions of 9:9 and 37:16. 9:9 reads: “the iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great...”. Here it is important to note that ‘house’ is in the singular and Israel and Judah are combined under this one house with one shared ‘iniquity’. Thus there is not a strong case here for the use of the term ‘house of Israel’ as a separate entity from that of the ‘house of Judah’ and referring only to the ten tribes. It may however show that the one ‘house’ is made up of two parts, namely Israel and Judah.

The other exception (Ezekiel 37:16-17) reads “As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.’ Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and *for* all the house of Israel, his companions.’ Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand.” In this passage we see the term ‘Israel’ relating to aspects of both the northern and southern kingdoms. More importantly here and in the continuation of the passage we see the attitude of the author of Ezekiel, in that he views the children of Israel (v21) no longer as two kingdoms but rather as one nation (see v22).

“And He said to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to the very day.” (Ezekiel 2:3)

This verse clearly shows, in its context, that the term ‘Israel’ is used here to refer not just to the ten tribes, but more properly to all Israel. This is especially true since Ezekiel’s audience consisted primarily of the exiles from the kingdom of Judah, to whom, along with their brothers still residing in the land of Canaan, the verse refers.

Additionally as Klein points out (p42), if the term ‘house of Israel’ refers to the

northern kingdom, the 390 years has no clear referent for the northern kingdom lasted at most about 250 years (or less according to modern calculations). However if the 390 years are calculated from the time of the start of the northern kingdom until they are joined by their Judean brothers in exile, then the term might refer to the northern kingdom in some sense. (See further discussion below)

Zimmerli pointed out that the end of verse 3 explains that the pretend siege Ezekiel was carrying out on his model of Jerusalem was to be a sign for ‘the house of Israel’. Since Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom, it is not likely that the use of house of Israel here could refer only to the ten northern tribes but rather to all the Israelite people.

In fact the main contention comes from the mention of the house of Judah in verse 6 with its own specific time of iniquity. This leads some to conclude that the use of ‘house of Israel’ refers only to the northern kingdom (Greenberg p104) and it leads others towards the conclusion that verse 6 is a gloss (see below). Dr. Baruch Schwartz comments that “Throughout the Bible, and not only in Ezekiel, “Israel” serves both as the name for the entire Israelite people and as the name for the northern tribes/kingdom. This is often the case even within the writings of a single author. The only way we can determine which meaning is intended is by the context *of the specific passage*—recourse to the style or usage of the particular author elsewhere in his work is of no help, since it is always possible that he simply never had an occasion to refer to the alternative concept. It seems rather obvious that when Israel is used in contradistinction to Israel, the meaning of the latter is more likely to be the North.”

The fact that the LXX uses the 150 that it inserts in verse 4 plus the 40 of verse 6 to add up to the total of 190 accredited to the house of Israel, seems to indicate that at least the Greek translators understood ‘house of Israel’ to encompass all 12 tribes.

Since in the book of Ezekiel the normal understanding of ‘house of Israel’ is to refer to all Israel, it seems that we should accept that understanding here. Yet to what

then does house of Judah refer to, especially in light of the discussion below which seems to indicate that the 390 years of the iniquity of the house of Israel lasted from Rehoboam to Ezekiel's day?

#### **40 days on his right side**

Ezekiel 4:6 "And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year."

Klein sees this verse as a gloss with the idea that the glossator understood 'house of Israel' (discussed above) to refer only to the northern kingdom (p42). Thus the glossator added something to deal with the southern kingdom. This idea of a gloss is supported by the fact that only the 390 days are mentioned in verse 9. The question naturally arises based on verse 9 as to whether Ezekiel also ate the special bread when he laid on his right side for 40 days. However one might also claim that '390' in verse 9 is a gloss since it seems an unnecessary addition to the verse, which would make at least as much sense without the words '390 days,' inserted into the sentence.

Against the idea of a gloss is the fact that in verse 4 Ezekiel is commanded to lie on his left side. But why mention 'left' at all unless he was later to lie on his right side. Of course one might therefore conclude, as Zimmerli does (p164) that the word 'left' is also a gloss since it is not found in verse 9.

As can be seen, the problem with Klein's idea and all others who think they have found a gloss in a given text is where to stop. Indeed Klein is doing the very thing he accuses the imagined glossator of doing, namely adjusting the text through addition (or deletion) of material in order to fit better with his own understanding.

Zimmerli likewise suggests that not only verse 6 but also other parts of verses 4-8 may be the result of later editing of the text (p164-5). The evidence he gives for this suggestion is the textual differences pertaining to the numbers, which are found in the LXX (discussed above). But such 'evidence' can be interpreted in many different ways

and is by no means conclusive proof indicating that the Hebrew text went through even one revision. This is especially true considering the numeric differences that are so frequent in other part of the LXX when compared to the Masoretic text. The genealogical records of Genesis being one example.

Zimmerli also attempts, as does Klein, to show that verse 6 must be a gloss because in verse 8 Ezekiel is told "And surely I will restrain you so that you cannot turn from one side to another till you have ended the days of your siege." Thus they conclude that Ezekiel would not have been able to make the switch from his left side after the 390 days to his right side for an additional 40 days. However as I noted above, it is unlikely that Ezekiel lay on either side non-stop due to cooking needs, not to mention the need for the W.C.! Verse 8 is likely to be understood to mean that Ezekiel would not roll back and forth as one does in his sleep, but rather would lie exclusively on one side every time he lay down. The Hebrew text actually reads "you will not be switched from your side to your side". I believe the form of the verb (niph'al, prefix form) does not speak to Ezekiel's ability to switch sides but rather to a repetitive, ongoing action that will not happen to him. Dr. Baruch Schwartz commented that "If the lying on the side is a sign, then wouldn't it be simpler and more logical to accept the suggestion that he was indeed to perform it for the given number of days but only when "performing", i.e. only when visited by those who came to see what the prophet had to say? (Greenberg). Thus, he did so for a few minutes, or for an hour or so, each day, while delivering to the listeners the oracles of 593-592 (represented in chs 4-7, though clearly not exhausted by them)."

Curiously Klein (based on Zimmerli) indirectly gives the text a very early date by stating that the gloss must have occurred before the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the exile (547 BC according to Klein) since the glossator must have thought the exile would end after only 40 years (p43). Accordingly, by logical deduction, if the gloss occurred before 547, when would the original have been written down? – not much earlier. In fact if Ezekiel is to be credited with the basic authorship of the entire material in the book, he might have

been alive to see his own writings being altered by this glossator! (See Ezekiel 40:1)

If we accept verse 6 as part of the original text, especially since we have no physical records to contradict this, then to what did the author intend the 40 years of the iniquity of the house of Judah to refer to? As Greenberg points out, since when did the tribe of Judah have only 40 years of sin? Even after the deportation of the northern tribes, the southern kingdom apparently had more than 40 years of sin. Clarke recounts Archbishop Newcome's interpretation that the 40 years consist of 15 years and six months during Manasseh's reign plus the complete reigns of all the kings after him except Josiah. Others contend that it refers to 40 years under Manasseh who was the only king who was said to cause Judah to sin (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:11) and who is specifically singled out in Kings as being the reason that God would not turn from his fierce wrath, in spite of Josiah's reforms (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:26). 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 24:3-4 states that the exile was a direct result of Manasseh's sins: "Surely at the command of the LORD this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon."

Those who hold to the view that the years of Judah's iniquity can be accredited to Manasseh's reign claim that Manasseh had 40 sinful years before he was taken into exile (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 33:10-13) and that his last 15 years occurred after he repented and was brought back. It is interesting to note that although Manasseh was king of Judah, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 33:18 says that: "...the rest of the acts of Manasseh...indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel". This is in contrast to the book of Kings, which states that Manasseh's acts were recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Judah (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21:17). The Chronicler may have been using the term Israel in this case, in the same sense Ezekiel did – to refer to all Israel and thus including Judah.

Another explanation may be that the forty years refer to the last 40 years of Manasseh's reign. In a separate paper (see *Hezekiah and Sennecherib*) I have argued that

Hezekiah's sickness may well have happened in his 29<sup>th</sup> year and that his 15 years of extended life were lived out in co-regency with his son. Thus Manasseh did not go bad till after his father died in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Manasseh's own reign. The last forty years of his reign would then be what is referred to as the years of Judah's iniquity. Even though Manasseh himself is recorded as repenting, the people seem to have only partially repented (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 33:17).

However I favor the view that the forty years of iniquity of the house of Judah refer to Solomon's reign and more specifically to refer to the first forty years of the temple during the period of the united kingdom ruled by the 'house of Judah'. As discussed below, the biblical reckoning for the period (based on the reigns of the kings of Judah) of the existence of the temple is 430 years, which is equal to 390 plus 40. The idea that Ezekiel would be referencing the period of the existence of the temple is not at all surprising since he was a priest and so much of the book of Ezekiel references the temple. However to refer to the whole period of the existence of the temple as being that of iniquity is a bit surprising for a priestly writer. Indeed such a bad view of the period when worship was centralized at the temple seems to be the style of a different type of author - one who did not favor centralizing worship in one place and in particular at Jerusalem!

### **The numbers 390, 40, and 430**

I noticed that if the number 390 pertains to the 10 northern tribes, and to both the length of years of their iniquity as well as to the length of their punishment, then there might be some connection to the idea of 40 stripes minus 1. In other words 39 lashes for each of the 10 tribes equals 390. However the tradition of giving one less lash than what was specified in order to guard against miscounting may not have been in place by this time (the tradition may be found at 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:24, referring to the command in Deut. 25:3).

Likewise the number 40 may be reminiscent of the 40 years of wondering in the

wilderness as punishment for their sins. Klein also considered this idea (p43) as does Zimmerli (p165) when he suggests a connection to Numbers 14:34 where the Israelites are told they will wonder in the wilderness one year for every day the spies had spied out the land. In Ezekiel the reckoning is just the opposite: one day represents a year. The question arises as to whether there is some sort of rite of absolution in this form of calculation, however the answer is not clear.

Though Zimmerli sees in the number forty itself the representation of the idea of punishment (based on the wondering in the wilderness), I think it is important to consider that the number is also related to the reigns of the two most famous kings in Israel - David and Solomon, whose reigns certainly did not represent periods of punishment. Additionally in the book of Judges on three different occasions the number of years that the Israelites had rest from their enemies was forty years (under Othniel, Gideon, and Barak). Conversely the flood lasted 40 days and forty nights. It seems that the most that can be concluded about the number forty in the bible (and other documents from the ancient middle east) is that it was a favorite number and had no specific connotation whether good or bad.

The number 430, as Klein and others have pointed out, may reflect back to Exodus 12:40-41 wherein it is recorded that the children of Israel spent exactly 430 years in Egypt and afterwards were delivered. Klein states that the usage of 40 and of the total 430 in Ezekiel “could be understood as referring to a limited period of exile” (p43) and thus a new exodus would come after the Babylonian exile.

One other interesting 430-year span is from Jehoiachin’s exile until the Maccabean revolt and the start of the Hasmonean kingdom (approx. 597 until approx 167), which marked the first time Israel was an independent nation again. Even if one were to say that the Greek text represents the original Hebrew and that the Masoretic text represents something from the Hasmonean period, the problem of how the later editors intended for the 390 and 40 years to be distributed over this period is difficult to solve.

It is also interesting to note that from the Assyrian exile in about 722 until Alexander the great in about 332 is a 390-year span.

### **The terminal point of the 390 years**

Ezekiel 2:3 seems to give some indication that 390 years had their terminal point in Ezekiel's day and not in the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes in 721 BC. The verse supports this by stating that the transgressions continued "to this very day"

The siege of Jerusalem seems to be the punishment for the transgressions and thus may be the terminal date of the 390 years.

### **The starting point of the 390 years**

Determining the starting point for the 390 years may be established by merely counting backward from the terminal point. As shown above the terminal point seems to be the siege of Jerusalem. Whether it is the beginning of the siege or the end only makes a difference of 18 months. If the end of the siege (the fall of Jerusalem) is considered, then the date of 586 BC would be the ending point and the starting point would be about 976 BC. Many modern scholars consider that date to be about the beginning of Solomon's reign. However by simply adding together the lengths for the reigns of the kings of Judah, that date points instead to about the end of Solomon's reign or in other words the beginning of Rehoboam's reign and the division of the kingdom into North and South. The actual total arrived at by adding together the reigns of the kings of Judah, as recorded in the book of Kings or Chronicles, from Rehoboam to Zedekiah is 394 years.

The date which modern scholars appoint to the beginning of Rehoboam's reign is actually of no consequence for understanding the passage, for what matters is the timeline accepted by the author of the book of Ezekiel. In other words if the author relied on records similar to those found in the book of Kings and Chronicles, he likely would have concluded that Rehoboam began to reign about 390 years before the fall of Jerusalem (as did Darby, p626), in other words in 976 BC. In fact the book of Kings or at least the source materials may have already existed in Ezekiel's day in a form similar to what we

posses today (especially since 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 25:27ff is considered by many to be a later appendage to an earlier redaction).

According to the idea of simply adding together the reigns of the kings of Judah, the exact beginning of the 390 years would actually fall in Rehoboam's 4<sup>th</sup> year, if we add to this the 40 years of the sins of Judah in verse 6, we arrive by this system at Solomon's 4<sup>th</sup> year. The author may very well have had this year in mind for in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 6:1 we read that the fourth year of Solomon was when they began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. In other words, as the rabbis also calculated, the temple stood for exactly 430 years. Again, though modern scholarship places differing dates for Solomon and Rehoboam based on external records, we are not concerned here with their understanding but rather with that of the author of Ezekiel chapter 4.

For example of the randomness of calculations based on modern chronological systems: Klein puts forward (possibly based on modern dating techniques and also his rejection of verse 6 as a gloss) that the 390 years alone were intended by the author to reach either to the beginning of the monarchy or the building of the temple (p43). Brownlee on the other hand, says that the 430 years bring us back to the beginning of Saul's reign and thus the period of iniquity covers the whole monarchical period. (p67) However Baruch Schwartz commented that, "These are good insights. Still, some serious consideration needs to be given to the fact that the author, presumably the prophet himself or a tradent recording his words and deeds, would not have had precise knowledge of the exact numbers of years of reigns and so forth, as he would not have read Kings and would not have made precise calculations. Rather he would have been relying on general "round" numbers he believed would be *rhetorically* representative of the general notion of Israel's and Judah's respective periods of sinfulness. For this reason, attempting to arrive at precise starting points and exact mathematical equations may be ill-advised, as it probably goes far beyond what the prophet had knowledge of and what the listeners may safely be assumed to have been capable of understanding.

Remember that prophetic activity, and rhetoric, is aimed at having an effect on the listener, at the time—not at recording historical-annalistic data.”

### **Length of the siege of Jerusalem**

The actual length of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces as recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 25:1-3 can be calculated in three different ways, depending on which calendar system was used by the writer of Kings in these verses. (Remember to count the first day of the siege inclusively, thus from the 10<sup>th</sup> day of one month until the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the next month is exactly one month and not one month minus one day). Based on a lunar month of 29 ½ days the total length of the siege was about 531 days, however if either the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah was a leap year and thus contained an extra month, the total may be as long as 561 days. Based on the 30-day month system previously used in the ancient Near East, the siege lasted either 540 days or 570 if a leap month was allowed. Based on the contemporary Babylonian/Assyrian calculation of a 364 ½ day solar year which was in use since the early 7<sup>th</sup> century and thus at the time of the siege, the total may have been about 545 days or more. Thus the total length of the siege of Jerusalem was between 531-570 days. Thus far no obvious connection can be made between the 430 days of Ezekiel’s prophecy and the length of the siege of Jerusalem.

Brownlee however does suggest that the siege of Jerusalem was lifted at the approach of Pharaoh Hophra (p65). Unfortunately Brownlee did not elaborate on this idea. Clarke likewise suggests that the 430 days represent the length of the siege of Jerusalem and that Nebuchadnezzar broke off the siege for a period of 140 days to deal with the Egyptian army.

Jeremiah 37:5ff does have the Chaldeans breaking off their siege in order to deal with Pharaoh’s army, apparently long enough for Jeremiah to busy himself with financial matters (37:12). It is possible that the siege lasted 390 days, was lifted for about 4 months and then continued another 40 days. It is curious to note that Nebuchadnezzar

was not present at the last part of the siege but was in Riblah in the land of Hamath (Jer. 39:5). It is possible that he had fought there with the Egyptian army (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:33) and had not left to return personally to the siege of Jerusalem. 40 days seems a reasonable length for the second phase of the siege since if it were a longer, more difficult period, Nebuchadnezzar likely would have personally returned to oversee it. The quick fall of the city in the second phase may have been caused by the soldiers who had fled in the interim between sieges (Jer.38:4).

The scarcity of bread during the inter-siege period and the prediction that it would run out indicates that the first phase of the siege had lasted long enough to miss the grain harvests (Jer.37:21). By counting backwards 40 days from the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month, you will arrive at 28<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month or just about the time of the Shavuot Holiday. This holiday marked the beginning of the harvest, thus if the Israelites had planted during the lift of the siege, their hopes of harvesting were dashed by the reinforcement of the siege. Once again, as at the giving of the law, which traditionally was on this holiday (but see Exodus 19:1), judgment falls on this holiday (Exodus 32:28).

### **Bearing the sin**

Ezekiel is told in verse 4 that during the 390 days he lies on his left side he will “bear the iniquity of the house of Israel”. Then in verse 6 he is told he will bear the iniquity of the house of Judah while he lies on his right side for 40 days. The various scholars debate whether this means that Ezekiel was to bear their sin in the sense of making atonement or in the sense of merely putting up with their sins, symbolizing God’s patience during the years before the exile. Klein records Rashi as suggesting that Ezekiel was symbolically representative of God “who had put up with Israel’s effrontery for 390 years” (Klein p42).

Zimmerli pointed out that the use of the term ‘bear iniquity’ occurs frequently in the passage of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. He further states that the concept of the suffering servant not ‘opening his mouth’ (Isaiah 53:7) makes for “undoubted contacts”

with Ezekiel 3:26 and possibly 24:27; 33:22.

Curiously for the New Testament scholar, many consider the length of Jesus' ministry before his crucifixion to be just over one year or about 390 days (though others claim 3 years based on John's gospel). Additionally it is recorded in Acts 1:3 that Jesus "...presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." It is well known that Jesus identified himself as the "son of man" (e.g. Mark 14:21), the term commonly used by God of Ezekiel (e.g. Ezekiel 4:1). If the use of these numbers in relation to Jesus ministry is more than coincidence, it shows, among other things, that the numbers in the Masoretic Hebrew text and not the LXX variants were the ones that were accepted in the first century AD.

The connection between Ezekiel, the "son of man" and the suffering servant (and/or God) of Isaiah chaps 52-53 is further demonstrated, as Zimmerli points out (p165), by the command to Ezekiel in verse 7 to make his arm uncovered. There is almost definitely a connection with Isaiah 52:10 where God's bare arm is poetically parallel to his salvation (Though Greenberg tries to show that the idea of bare arm was one of fighting and vengeance by referencing Jeremiah 21:5, that passage refers not to a bare arm but to an outstretched arm). What's more, the context of the Isaiah passage is in relation to Jerusalem just as the Ezekiel passage is. The connection between the two passages only grows stronger in the question at Isaiah 53:1 "And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" and then at Isaiah 53:6b "And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." the connection to Ezekiel being commanded to "lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it (lit. 'him')" seems strong.

Although the passage in Isaiah refers to God's bare arm as salvation, Zimmerli considers the Ezekiel passage to be properly interpreted as God's bare arm (represented in Ezekiel's bare arm) to be a threat. This however would seem to contradict Zimmerli's previous assessment by indicating that the 390 days are not intended as part of the

bearing of the iniquity in an atonement sense but rather God's patience having run out with Jerusalem. Brownlee (p69) suggests that his bare arm and prophesying are actually part of making intercession on behalf of Jerusalem.

### **Conclusion**

The present author considers the term 'house of Israel' in this passage to refer to the people of Israel in general (not just the ten tribes) from the time of the division of the kingdom onward. I consider the term 'house of Judah' to refer to the period of the united monarchy which was centered in Jerusalem and whose kings, David and Solomon, were of the tribe of Judah. Therefore the 390 years refer to the period lasting from early in Rehoboam's reign when the kingdom split until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The 40 years of the iniquity of the house of Judah refers to the period when Solomon of the house of Judah reigned over all Israel, for it is he who introduced foreign gods to Israel via his wives. These combined periods which equal 430 years would have also been the period of time that the author of Ezekiel considered the temple to have stood for. I view the LXX variants as attempts by latter translators to correct the text based on their flawed understanding that the time periods were somehow to represent the length of years of the exiles of the northern and southern kingdoms. I also understand the days Ezekiel lay on his two sides to represent not only years in Israelite history but also the length of days of the two phased siege of Jerusalem for that is the very thing Ezekiel was portraying in chapter four.

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The numbers at the end of some of the entries refers to the shelf location in the central library of the Hebrew University Mt. Scopus Campus in Jerusalem, Israel.

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