

Ezekiel Lesson 04

Ezekiel Chapter 4

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Introduction: We continue in our study on the book of Ezekiel. In chapter 3, we saw God giving Ezekiel a commission to be a watchman to the house of Israel.

In chapter 4, the prophecy of the book begins in earnest. The theme of this chapter is the sign of the (clay) tile. It deals specifically with the siege of Jerusalem in verses 1-8 and the famine the inhabitants will suffer in verses 9- 17. The prophecy begins with an object lesson upon a piece of clay tiling.

I. The Sign of the Clay Tile

Eze 4:1 Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:

Eze 4:2 And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about.

Ezekiel was directed to take a tile, set it in front of him, and then draw a representation of the city of Jerusalem upon it. The idea is of clay-fired building material.

Ancient Babylonians routinely wrote 'cuneiforms' upon such clay tablets before they were dried and hardened. That may be what is in view here.

Upon the tile, Ezekiel was also directed to portray a battle scene upon it. A siege, complete with forts, siege mounds, and encampment of soldiers, was to be portrayed upon the clay tablet by Ezekiel. What is unfolding is a graphic description of the final siege against Jerusalem.

It should be recalled that Ezekiel wrote from within Babylon and prior to the final fall of Jerusalem. At hand is a graphic prophecy of the impending final fall of Jerusalem.

Eze 4:3 Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.

Eze 4:4 Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear

their iniquity.

Ezekiel was then directed to take an iron pan and set it up between himself and the portrayal of Jerusalem on his clay tablet. The iron likely was a symbol of the hardness of the hearts of Israel and its color symbolized the blackness of their sins.

Ezekiel was represented as God and how the sins of Israel had separated between them. The result was the impending final siege by Babylon against Jerusalem. The sign clearly was that the sin of Israel had brought about the final destruction looming against them. All of this clearly was designed to be a *sign* to the house of Israel.

1Co 1:22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

Some have alleged that Ezekiel lying upon his side was in a vision. However, it seems apparent that this was a literal act with symbolic value. Distinction is made in the following text between the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

When lying with the one's face toward the north, the prophet would be looking north and accordingly toward the house of Israel (i.e., the northern kingdom). The iniquity of Israel evidently was to be laid either upon the clay tablet described above or more likely upon the iron pan. The greater point is that the sin of Israel separated between them and their God. The length of this object lesson will be defined in the next verse.

Eze 4:5 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.

Eze 4:6 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.

Various schemes have been advanced accounting for 390 years of the sin of Israel. Perhaps the best is that there was approximately 390 years from the division of the kingdom under Jeroboam and the golden calves to the final Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The end of verse 6 makes clear that these days represent years.

The major iniquity of the house of Israel (i.e., the northern kingdom) was the sin of the golden calves. Ezekiel was to (by way of an object lesson) symbolize that sin. It should not be inferred that the prophet did not arise during those 390 days for necessary purposes, but rather that he symbolized this action every day during this period.

In like fashion, the prophet was to lie upon his right side facing southward representing the southern kingdom of Judah for forty days. Again, the forty days represented the years of the sin of the southern kingdom Judah.

Though the number forty has ample spiritual significance throughout Scripture, here it is related directly to the sin of Judah. The sin in question may refer to the final forty years of Manasseh's reign in which the sin of Judah reached the point of no return as far as God was concerned.

2Ki 23:26 Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

2Ki 23:27 And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

From that time onward, judgment was appointed against Judah, though postponed for the righteousness of Josiah. Of further interest is that 390 plus 40 equals 430 which was the number of years from Abraham to the giving of the Law and their sojourn.

Exo 12:40 Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.

Exo 12:41 And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

Gal 3:17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

The greater truth is that Ezekiel was to lie upon his sides symbolizing the respective years of sin in the houses of Israel.

II. Ezekiel Was to Set His Face Toward the Siege of Jerusalem

Eze 4:7 Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it.

Eze 4:8 And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege.

The judgment of the northern kingdom had already passed (in 722 B.C.). The focal point of God's wrath now was against Judah and Jerusalem. Ezekiel was directed to set his face toward the coming siege of Jerusalem. The uncovering of his arm was an eastern expression referring to preparing for military action.

From that posture, Ezekiel was directed to prophecy against Jerusalem. All of what Ezekiel was doing was figurative yet plain for all to see the truth that it represented. God foretold how he would tie the prophet down so that he could not turn over to the other side. This likely was further symbolism, perhaps enacted only symbolically.

The point was very clear. Jerusalem would not be able to shake off the coming siege laid against it by Babylon. Ezekiel symbolized that fate with the object lessons instructed by God.

John Gill said this about verse 8 in his commentary.

And, behold, I will lay hands upon thee,.... Representing either the besieged, signifying that they should be taken and bound as he was; or rather the besiegers, the Chaldean army, which should be so held by the power and providence of God, that they should not break up the siege until they had taken the city, and fulfilled the whole will and pleasure of God; for these bands were an emblem of the firm and unalterable decree of God, respecting the siege and taking of Jerusalem; and so the Targum paraphrases it,

"and, lo, the decree of my word is upon thee, as a band of ropes;"

and to this sense Jarchi interprets it; and which is confirmed by what follows:

and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another till thou hast ended the days of thy siege; showing that the Chaldean army should not depart from Jerusalem until it was taken; for though, upon the report of the Egyptian army coming against them, they went forth to meet it; yet they returned to Jerusalem, and never left the siege till the city fell into their hands, according to the purpose and appointment of God. Kimchi

that the word for siege is in the plural number, and signifies both the "siege" of Samaria and the siege of Jerusalem; but the former was over many years before this time: by this it appears that the siege of Jerusalem should last three hundred and ninety days; indeed, from the beginning to the end of it, were seventeen months, [2Ki_25:1](#); but the siege being raised by the army of the king of Egypt for some time, [Jer_37:5](#), may reduce it to thirteen months, or thereabout; for three hundred and ninety days are not only intended to signify the years of Israel's sin and wickedness, but also to show how long the city would be besieged; and so long the prophet in this symbolical way was besieging it.

Eze 4:9 Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof.

Eze 4:10 And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it.

Eze 4:11 Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink.

Of the first 390 days of this sign, Ezekiel was directed to eat only a mixture of grains (i.e., vegetarian). However, there is a downward progression from wheat to fitches. Wheat was a desirable grain. Fitches were a coarse, wild seed. The thought likely is of the spiritual degeneration which befell the northern kingdom, ending with the bitter starvation diet of fitches in the final siege of Samaria.

Represented is a near starvation diet such as would befall Jerusalem in its final siege. Twenty shekels amounts to about ten ounces. The greater point is that Ezekiel was to eat only ten ounces a day of these foods, ending with the bitter fitches.

A sixth part of a hin was slightly more than a pint. The prophet was to only drink about a pint of water a day, which again typified the near starvation conditions which would exist in Jerusalem in the final siege thereof.

Eze 4:12 And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that

cometh out of man, in their sight.

Eze 4:13 And the LORD said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them.

Barley was a coarse grain suitable for animal feed. Bread made thereof was coarse and a last resort for food. To this day, it is not uncommon for nomadic Arabs to use dried animal dung as a fuel for their baking ovens. Human dung is considered an abomination. God directed Ezekiel to so bake his coarse bread.

The greater thought is of the desperate conditions of the siege of Judah being symbolized by the prophet. Though Ezekiel's primary focus was against Judah, yet God still reminded the northern kingdom in its captivity why they faced such desperate conditions. Their hardship was a result of their unrepentant sin.

III. Ezekiel Questions God About His Directions

Eze 4:14 Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth.

Eze 4:15 Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith.

Ezekiel was an observant, orthodox Jew who had carefully observed the Jewish dietary code from his youth. He had never knowingly violated its hygienic code. To bake bread with human waste as fuel was repulsive to him and he protested this to God. God therefore relented and allowed the prophet to bake with cow's dung, which though not the best was at least acceptable.

The greater thought remained that during the final siege of Jerusalem, the little bread made would be prepared with human dung.

Eze 4:16 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment:

Eze 4:17 That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity.

The application of the entire chapter is now made clear. In the coming siege against Jerusalem, food would become almost nonexistent and that which there was would be coarse weed seed such as fitches and baked by human waste. Measuring bread by weight speaks of small pieces thereof placed on scales and rationing it out.

Water would be carefully rationed and many would be appalled at its foul condition. In short, conditions in the final siege of Jerusalem would be terrible—near starvation with little drinkable water.

The thought is in those terrible days, the inhabitants of Jerusalem would lack food and water and be desolate. The underlying cause was their unrepentant sin. That is the point of this entire chapter.

Matthew Henry said this about these last verses of chapter 4.

Thus was figured the extremity to which the Jews were to be reduced during the siege and captivity. Ezekiel does not plead, Lord, from my youth I have been brought up delicately, and never used to any thing like this; but that he had been brought up conscientiously, and never had eaten any thing forbidden by the law. It will be comfortable when we are brought to suffer hardships, if our hearts can witness that we have always been careful to keep even from the appearance of evil. See what woeful work sin makes, and acknowledge the righteousness of God herein. Their plenty having been abused to luxury and excess, they were justly punished by famine. When men serve not God with cheerfulness in the abundance of all things, God will make them serve their enemies in the want of all things.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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