

# Ezekiel 04 - Four Signs of the Coming Siege; Ezekiel's 430 Days; Unclean Food Illustrating the Severity of the Siege

## I. Imminent judgment upon Judah (Ezek 1:1—24:27)

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## Ezekiel 4

- (2) Prophecies of coming judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (Ezek 4:1—24:27)
  - (A) Imminent judgment (Ezek 4:1—11:25)
    - (a) Four signs showing the reality of the coming siege (Ezek 4:1—5:17)

Ezek 4:1—5:17 describes four symbolic actions that the prophet carried out at around the same time:

- The sign of the brick (4:1-3)
- The sign of the posture (4:4-8)
- The sign of the defiled bread (4:9-17)
- The sign of the shaved head (5:1-4)
  - The interpretation of all four signs (5:5-17)

These actions were to serve as a sign to the house of Israel (4:3), warning of the impending siege on Jerusalem. As Ezekiel was locked up in his home and bound with ropes, he had no opportunity to go among the people and deliver his message. Attention had to be drawn to him in other ways. The prophet's "sign-acts" engaged the people's senses, a method not exclusive to Ezekiel but shared with others, such as Ahijah (1 Kings

11:29-31), Elijah (2 Kings 2:7-8), and Isaiah (Is 20). The overarching purpose of his signs was to elicit a recognition of God's sovereignty. The people were to acknowledge that He is God.

(i) Brick indicating fact of the siege (4:1-3)

1 "Now you, son of man, get yourself **a brick**, place it before you, and inscribe a city on it—Jerusalem.

1 "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem.

1 "And now Son of Man, you are to take a brick, set it in front of you, and inscribe on it the outline of the city—that is, Jerusalem.

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

- "...a brick" - the first sign was to use a "brick" to create a miniature city layout of Jerusalem with walls and siege objects to illustrate Babylon's final coming siege (586 BC) and Jerusalem's destruction

— Ezekiel was instructed by God to draw the outline of Jerusalem on this brick/tile

2 Then **laysiege** against it, **build a siege wall, pile up an assault ramp, set up camps, and place battering rams against it all around.**

2 Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around.

2 You are to lay siege against it, build a rampart around it, set a bulwark against it, encircle it with a berm, set up camps against it, and place battering rams around it.

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.

- "...lay siege" - Ezekiel was then instructed to find whatever he could to create a model to illustrate an attack on Jerusalem

- "...build a siege wall" - build a "fort" against the city to prevent anyone from escaping the city

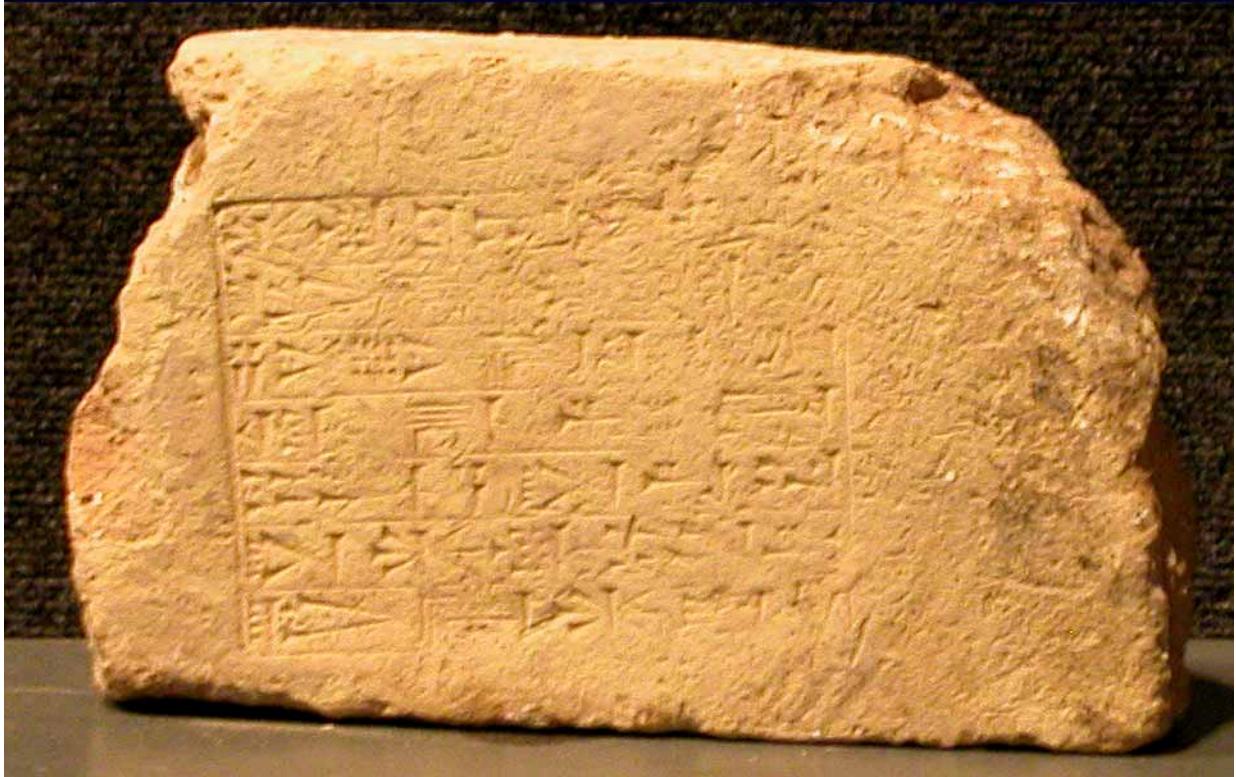
- "...pile up an assault ramp" - earthen mounds piled against a wall that served as a ramp for invading forces to scale a wall

- "...set up camps" - Ezekiel was to set up military-style camps around Jerusalem

- "...place battering rams against it all around" - used to create breaches in walls and break open gates

— All four parts of Ezekiel's model indicated that the city would be cut off, leaving its inhabitants without water and food. People passing by and seeing Ezekiel's model would be able to recognize a city under siege.

# Babylonian Brick



3 Then get yourself an **iron plate** and set it up as an iron wall between yourself and the city, and **direct your face toward it** so that it is under siege, and **besiege it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.**

3 Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel.

3 Then you are to take a flat, iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city.

"Next, you are to turn toward it, oppose it, and place it under siege, because you are to lay siege to it. All of this will serve as a sign to the house of Israel.

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.

- In this third part of God's instruction to Ezekiel, he was to take an iron pan and set it up as a wall between himself and his model city of Jerusalem

— This was to be a "wall of partition" between Ezekiel and Jerusalem, indicating that Ezekiel would be protected by God as he pronounced judgment upon Jerusalem

- "...iron plate" - *machavat*, used as pans for baking bread; the priests used them for preparing the meal offering (Lev 2:5). Thus, Ezekiel, as a priest, would've been familiar.
- "...direct your face toward it" - Ezekiel was instructed to turn his face toward the model city, meaning that he was in opposition to it
- "...besiege it" - God emphatically stated that Jerusalem would be besieged, and the one laying siege against it would be Ezekiel as God's representative through messages of judgment
  - The siege of Jerusalem, at this point, was certain and irrevocable: God was resolved to destroy Jerusalem
  - "...This *will* be a sign to the house of Israel" - the purpose behind these strange skits was to provide a sign to the house of Israel
  - "Israel" in this instance refers to Judah (southern kingdom), rather than the northern kingdom, which had been taken in exile in 722 BC by Assyria. To be more specific, "house of Israel," based on Ezekiel's setting in Babylon, refers to the Jews still in Judah.
  - Two sieges of Jerusalem had already taken place, yet the city was not yet destroyed. God's message to the exiles still in Judah, through Ezekiel's symbolic actions, provided absolutely no doubt that Jerusalem would face a third and final siege, where it would be utterly destroyed.

(ii) Lying on right and left side indicating length of the siege (4:4-8)

(a) Left side for Israel (4:4-5)

**4** "Then you are to lie down on your left side and put the wrongdoing of the house of Israel on it; you shall **bear their wrongdoing** for the number of days that you lie on it.

**4** "As for you, lie down on your left side and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it.

**4** "Now as for you, you are to sleep on your left side, symbolically bearing the punishment of the house of Israel while you're counting the days you'll be sleeping on your left side to bear symbolically the punishment for their sin.

**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.

- The second symbolic action that God instructed Ezekiel to take was to lie on his left side (for 390 days, v5), then subsequently move to laying on his right side (for 40 days, v6)
- In the OT, directions are always oriented from the east. When facing east, left is north and right is south (Cf. Gen 14:15; Ps 121:5).

— When laying on his left side, Ezekiel would've been facing the Northern Kingdom of Israel; when laying on his right side, he would've been facing the Southern Kingdom of Judah

— This is confirmed by the use of "house of Israel" (v4,5) and "house of Judah" (v6)

— "...bear their wrongdoing" - not sure what this means

— The Jewish rabbis believed that this act would atone for the sins of the people, but that doesn't seem to sync with how sins are atoned for throughout Scripture, so it's a very unlikely interpretation

5 For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their wrongdoing, 390 days; so you shall bear the wrongdoing of the house of Israel.

5 For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

5 I've assigned you to sleep this way for 390 days, representing the years they've been sinning, as you bear symbolically the punishment of the house of Israel.

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.

- Each day Ezekiel laid on his left side corresponded to one year of the wrongdoing of the Northern Kingdom

(b) Right side for Judah (4:6-8)

6 When you have completed these *days*, you shall lie down a second time, *but on your right side*, and bear the wrongdoing of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, **a day for each year**.

6 When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, *but on your right side* and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year.

6 When you have completed this, you are to sleep on your right side, symbolically bearing the iniquity of Judah for 40 days. Each day that I've assigned to you represents one year.

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.

- After the 390 days are complete, God instructed Ezekiel to lay on his right side, to bear the wrongdoing of the house of Judah

— Ezekiel did not remain in this position 24 hours a day, because the very next sign includes some other actions Ezekiel was to do in that time (v9-17). He probably remained in this position for a portion of each day.

- "...a day for each year" - the timeframe for Judah was 40 days, but here we're told that each day represents one year

Attempts to identify a significant 40-year period in Judah's history preceding Ezekiel's time have always failed. Hence, there is a need for alternative perspectives or considerations.

Ezekiel was instructed to remain on his bed for a total of 430 days, symbolizing 430 years of Jewish history. Yet, when examining this history from before Ezekiel's era, it proves challenging to identify spans of either 390, 40, or 430 years. However, a forward-looking

approach, starting from the time of Ezekiel, could solve the dilemma. The 430-year span might correspond to the period during which Israel lacked national autonomy and was under foreign rule. If dated from the second deportation, when Ezekiel was taken into Babylon, in 597 BC, the conclusion of the 430 years would be in 167 BC, coinciding with the Maccabean Revolt.

7 Then you shall **direct your face toward the siege of Jerusalem** with your **arm bared**, and prophesy against it.

7 Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared and prophesy against it.

7 After this, you are to turn toward the rampart of Jerusalem and oppose it with your bare arms, because I'm going to prophesy about it.

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

- "...direct your face toward the siege of Jerusalem" - Ezekiel had inscribed and modeled this siege on the brick/tile (v1-3), and now he was to turn his face toward it

- "...arm bared" - the fact that his arm was uncovered means he had freedom of movement to re-enact the attack on the city

8 Now behold, **I will** put ropes around you so that you cannot turn from your one side to your other until you have completed the days of your siege.

8 Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.

8 Look! I'll tie you up so that you're unable to turn from one side to the other until you've completed your siege."

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.

- "...I will" - the importance of this verse is the fact that God Himself would fasten Ezekiel in his position so that he could not turn from one side to another (Cf. 3:25)

(iii) Unclean food indicating severity of the siege (4:9-17)

(a) Divine command to cook food over human excrement (4:9-13)

9 "But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, **millet**, and spelt, and put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, 390 days.

9 "But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.

9 "Furthermore, you are to take some wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt, and mix them together in one container. Then you are to make bread from these grains sufficient to supply you through the time during which you'll be sleeping on your side. You are to eat it for 390 days.

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.

- The third symbolic act is defiled bread...

- Ezekiel was commanded to combine various grains and vegetables to make dough, and bake it into a bread for himself. These were common grains in Israel's diet (2 Sam 17:27-29).

— Some Jewish rabbis accuse Ezekiel of breaking the Mosaic Law by combining these ingredients, believing they violate Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9. However, these two passages only prohibit the mixing of grains during sowing; they do not forbid their mixing for baking.

- Ezekiel was to bake enough bread to last him 390 days (at the allotted amount in v10)

— The point God is trying to get across here is that this is a picture of a society facing severe food shortages, where people resort to mixing anything edible to sustain themselves

10 Your food which you eat *shall be* twenty shekels a day **by weight**; you shall eat it from **time to time**.

10 Your food which you eat *shall be* twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time.

10 The food that you'll be eating is to consist of portions weighing 20 shekels, to be consumed daily at regular intervals.

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

- "...twenty shekels" - a shekel weighs 0.4 of an ounce, thus his food allowance was about eight ounces a day

- "...by weight" - to eat bread by weight is a Jewish expression of poverty (Cf. Lev 26:26)

- "...time to time" - once every 24 hours

11 The water you drink shall be a **sixth of a hin** by measure; you shall drink it from time to time.

11 The water you drink shall be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time.

11 You are to measure one sixth of one hin of water each time you drink it.

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

- "...sixth of a hin" - his water ration was about a pint and a half a day, a very small amount in a hot climate

12 You shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked *it* in their sight over human dung."

12 You shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked *it* in their sight over human dung."

12 You are to eat it as barley cakes and bake it right in front of them, using dried human dung for cooking fuel."

12 And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight.

- Ezekiel now received instructions for how to cook...

— The dough mixture was to be shaped into barley cakes, and the process had to be carried out openly, in the sight of the people ("baked *it* in their sight"), since the lesson from this sign-act was for them

— Ezekiel was instructed to fuel the fire needed for baking with human feces (dung)

— According to Deut 23:12-14, human feces was considered unclean. However, Ezekiel was not to add all the feces to the dough, but to use it as fuel for the fire.

13 Then the LORD said, "In this way the sons of Israel will eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will scatter them."

13 Then the LORD said, "Thus will the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will banish them."

13 Then the LORD said, "This is how the Israelis will be eating unclean food among the nations, where I'll be sending them."

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

- The application for Ezekiel's audience (the Jews who remained in Judah) was that what Ezekiel was instructed to do by God symbolically, the children of Israel would do in reality when they were taken into exile, both to Babylon and Egypt: they would eat their bread unclean (Cf. Hosea 9:3)

(b) Ezekiel's objection to human excrement (4:14)

14 But I said, "Oh, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what **died of itself** or was **torn by animals**, nor has any **unclean meat** ever entered my mouth!"

14 But I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat

ever entered my mouth."

**14** "Now, Lord GOD," I replied, "I've never been defiled, ever since I was young until now. I haven't eaten an animal that died on its own or was torn by beasts, and no unclean meat has ever entered my mouth!"

**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.

- Although using human feces for cooking does not equate to consuming defiled food, Ezekiel's reaction to God's instructions was one of shock, leading him to voice his protest
- Ezekiel saw the use of human (his own?) feces as fuel for cooking as defiling, and expressed concern about its impact on his own health
- However, God's instruction to use human feces as fuel did not violate Deut 23:12-14 because that statute did not prohibit cooking with dung/feces
- Nevertheless, Ezekiel felt like it violated his lifelong commitment to avoiding defilement from impure substances, from his youth up until now
- "...died of itself" - he had only eaten slaughtered meat, in obedience to Lev 7:24; 22:8; Deut 14:21
- "...torn by animals" - forbidden by Ex 22:31; Lev 7:24; 22:8
- "...unclean meat" - sacrificial meat that was older than three days (Lev 7:18; 19:7)
- It's likely, based on his priestly background, that Ezekiel was particularly sensitive to maintaining ritual purity

(c) Divine command to cook food over animal excrement (4:15)

**15** Then He said to me, "See, I will give you cow's dung in place of human dung, so that you may prepare your bread over it."

**15** Then He said to me, "See, I will give you cow's dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread."

**15** "Okay," he responded. "I'll allow you to substitute cow's dung for human dung. Cook your food over that."

**15** Then he [God] said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith.

- Hearing and understanding Ezekiel's reluctance and protest (v14), God graciously condescended to Ezekiel's scruples and allowed him to use cow dung for fuel instead of human feces

(d) Explanation: scarcity of food during siege (4:16-17)

**16** Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, behold, I am going to **break** the **staff** of bread in Jerusalem, and they will **eat bread by weight** and with anxiety, and **drink water by**

**measure and in horror,**

16 Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror,

16 He also told me, "Son of Man, look! I'm about to disrupt the source of bread in Jerusalem. As a result, they'll ration bread by weight while their terror continues to grow and they'll ration drinking water while their horror continues to mount!

**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:

- The purpose of the sign of the defiled bread was explained in v13, but its significance becomes unmistakable in v16-17...

- "...break" - *shavar*, cutting off

- "...staff" - *matteh*, supply

— So the breaking of the staff meant that God was going to cut off Judah's food supply and plunge them into famine (Cf. Lev 26:26), symbolizing an impending siege by the Babylonians

- "...eat bread by weight" - indicates scarcity

- "...drink water by measure" - indicates drought

- "...in horror" - in fearfulness and anxiety; in addition to the judgment of famine and drought, the population would be plunged into fearfulness and anxiety of what was to come

17 because bread and water will be scarce; and they will tremble with one another and **waste away in their guilt.**

17 because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity.

17 Indeed, they'll need bread and water, but everyone will be panic-stricken as they waste away in their iniquity."

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

- The intensity of the famine would reach a point where people desperate for bread and water would be unable to find any

— The situation would lead to a mutual dismay among the people

- "...waste away in their guilt" - "heartsick over their iniquity" (after they were exiled to Babylon); this is a fulfillment of Lev 26:39