

**Message #7****Ezekiel 4:1-17**

One of the unique stories from the life of Christ comes as He was walking into Jerusalem and He pronounced a curse on a fig tree. He was hungry and there were no figs on the tree, so He cursed the tree so that it could never bear any fruit. Now the reason why He did that was because that tree sat just outside of Jerusalem and it became a physical example of the spiritual condition of Israel. God was actually pronouncing a judgment on Israel so that it would not bear any fruit. He was going to remove His dynamic life force from that nation because she was so corrupt. That fig tree became a tangible reminder of that.

As we come to this passage, we come to a very unusual text in which Ezekiel is commanded by God to do something that appears to be very strange. We already know he was to lock himself up in his house and have himself tied up. But in all reality this sign here takes it to a whole different level. This is a physical warning sign of what God was doing to His own people, and a sign of what He was going to do to Jerusalem.

Now there have been “seeker-friendly churches” who have actually cited this text as a basis for promoting their drama and plays as a visual aid to reaching and entertaining the lost.

To such nonsense we respond that this is not directed at the lost, it is aimed at O.T. Israel. Furthermore, this is not a play invented by a man to entertain a crowd; this was a direct mandate from God to a prophet to communicate a point.

**The mandate given to the church is to preach God’s Word, and study to rightly divide the word and not put on plays.** Furthermore, there are no prophets today, who get direct messages from God to do what Ezekiel is called to do. Paul is very clear that this gift of prophecy is no longer in existence (I Cor. 13:8). Prophets received direct revelatory messages from God and often received strange assignments from God, specifically as it related to Israel and this is one of the strangest.

**EZEKIEL WAS DIRECTED BY GOD TO DO SOMETHING PHYSICAL THAT BECAME A WARNING ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT GOD WOULD PHYSICALLY DO TO ISRAEL.**

**Ezekiel 4-24 gives a series of prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem. They are prophecies designed to predict “impending doom.”** Remember God had appointed Ezekiel to be the watchman over Israel and part of his responsibilities were to warn God’s people about God’s future judgments. Israel was living in disobedience to God and God will not tolerate that for long. Ezekiel’s job was to confront her and warn her and one way to do that was as a physical example.

**Now in this chapter there are four signs designed to reveal to God’s people that because of their rebellion their captivity would not be short-lived and the destruction of their beloved city Jerusalem was guaranteed.**

**PROPHETIC SIGN #1 – The sign of the brick. 4:1-3**

Now the purpose of what is described in these verses was to show Israel that Jerusalem was about to be sieged, specifically by the Babylonians.

Notice that Ezekiel is identified in **verse 1** as the “son of man,” so this is a specific Divine assignment given to a real man who lived as a real human in real time. He was acting in behalf of God in this assignment.

What God tells him to do is “get a brick.” The Babylonians were specifically known for using clay bricks. In fact, A. C. Gaebelien said, “whole libraries consisting of a very large number of such bricks have been uncovered by the spade of an excavator” (*Ezekiel*, p. 36). Many bricks have been found that are almost a perfect square 14 by 12 inches.

Now bricks were dried by putting them out in the sun. So if you were going to write something or draw something on it, you needed to do that before the bricks were baked. This is kind of like inscribing things in the concrete; you need to do that before it hardens.

In **verse 1**, Ezekiel was told by God to get one of those bricks and to inscribe some drawing of the city of Jerusalem on it. Moshe Greenberg said it could be that he could have drawn a map of the city on it (*Ezekiel*, Vol. 1, p. 102).

According to **verse 2**, after Ezekiel had done that he was to lay siege to it. He was to build some miniature seize wall, rise up a ramp, pitch camps around the brick. Once he had built this, he was to bring forth battering rams to attack the brick. Those rams were to be all around the brick.

According to **verse 3**, Ezekiel was to get an iron plate and use it as a barrier between himself and the city and then he was to set his face against the city. That iron plate represented a total severance of God’s relationship with His people. God was cutting off a relationship with His own people. God was not tender to His people at this point; He was hardened to them because of their rebellion. This illustrated an “impenetrable barrier” between God and His own people.

The setting of the face was a Divine glaring of God that expressed His anger. If God reaches this state concerning His own people, it is tragic news. It is deadly serious.

Now at the end of **verse 3** we read “this is a sign to the house of Israel.” The purpose of this was to illustrate God’s attitude toward Jerusalem and Israel. He was going to sovereignly control the total destruction of His city and people. Awful things were going to happen to Israel and Jerusalem and God Himself was in sovereign control of every bit of it.

**PROPHETIC SIGN #2 – The sign of Ezekiel’s physical position. 4:4-8**

Now the purpose of what is described in these verses is to show Israel that her punishment and captivity will not be quick. It is clear from the context that the lying down was not lying down in a bed as some invalid for 430 days.

In fact, we know from **verse 9** that he was to move around and do some things. Apparently he was to lie down as **verse 10** says, “from time to time.”

What God demanded that Ezekiel do was to lie down on his left side for 390 days (**4:4-5**) and then lie down on his right side for 40 more days (**4:6**). Lying down on both sides illustrates both Northern and Southern kingdoms are guilty of wallowing in sin. In both cases he is symbolically in this miserable state because he is bearing the sin and iniquity of the entire nation. What this means is that Ezekiel is physically showing Israel that her sin is the cause of her punishment. The reason she is enslaved is her sin. We see from **verses 5** and **6** that one day is representative of one year.

Now the total number of days is 430 which obviously represent 430 years (**v. 5**). The first thing that pops into our minds when we read 430 years is Exodus 12:40-41, that says God delivered Israel from the captivity of Egypt after 430 years.

So we could initially say that this illustrates to Israel that the captivity that God is permitting will not be an overnight camp out. She is going to be held captive for a while. But eventually God will deliver her just as He did after 430 years in Egypt. In fact, Ezekiel refers to this very episode later in Ezekiel 20:34-36 to give hope to Israel.

Some scholars have suggested that if you calculate the date of the Babylonian captivity, which is 586 B.C. and then subtract 390 years backward from 586 B.C., you arrive to the date of 976 B.C. which was the year the construction of the Temple began. What this would illustrate is that the entire time the Temple has been standing, the whole nation was in rebellion. But it was about to be destroyed.

We tend to think the total years means that Israel will be in captivity for many years but then God will deliver her.

**Verse 7** says that again Ezekiel is to set his face against Jerusalem and have his “arm bared.” This is illustrating that God is about to deal a severe blow to His own people. Ezekiel was to prophesy against her.

Now the purpose of God putting ropes on Ezekiel was to illustrate that there was no way of Israel escaping this judgment. She was not going to get out of this captivity until God would let her out.

This is a judgment of God against His own people.

### **PROPHETIC SIGN #3** – The sign of famine and unclean bread. **4:9-17**

The purpose of this sign was to show God’s people that the reason for the famine in a relationship with Him and the reason for the judgments against His own people is that she was unclean. She was involved in unclean dirty things, which is the reason for the judgment of God.

Now God demanded in **verse 9** that Ezekiel was to gather certain things to eat as he was lying down: 1) Wheat; 2) Barley; 3) Beans; 4) Lentils; 5) Millet; 6) Spelt

What is odd about this is that there apparently is not enough of one ingredient to make a pure loaf. Things needed to be mixed together to form one loaf. That is how lean things would be.

Now these ingredients were to be used to make some loaf of bread. These ingredients are a mixture of ingredients that would be used if you did not have enough of one ingredient. There is a statement in the Babylonian Talmud (Erubin 81a) that says an experiment was conducted with these ingredients to make a loaf of bread that “would not be touched even by a dog” (Greenberg, p. 106).

Now the amount of food that he was to eat from time to time as he was lying on his side was not enough to fill you up. It was twenty shekels a day worth of food. Now a shekel is 4/10ths of an ounce so he was to eat about eight ounces of bread from time to time as he was lying on his side. (**verse 10**).

Furthermore, according to **verse 11**, he was to drink some water from time to time. That too was regulated. This turned out to be about 2/3rds of a quart of water.

**If you calculate the food and water, this is a near starvation diet.**

The point of this is to show that Israel was not prospering because of her unfaithfulness. She was living a life of nickels and dimes because God was not blessing her. Instead of her eating good food and drinking all she wanted, she was living in poverty and rationing things just to survive.

Now **verse 12** presents something gross. Not only was the bread unappetizing and the small rations unfilling, Ezekiel was to eat these cakes baked over human dung. The part barley cake was something people of lower income ate. Typically one would use animal dung for fuel, but animals would be so scarce that they would have to use human dung for fuel.

Now after God told Ezekiel that this is what he was to do; he said in **verse 13** this is all due to My judgment. I am having them eat unclean things in foreign nations because as a judgment I have taken them out of their land and banished them.

When Ezekiel heard all of this he responded in **verse 14** and said “I have never been defiled from my youth. He had never eaten anything unclean. He had never eaten any dead animal and certainly he had never eaten anything cooked over human dung.

In **verse 15**, God took mercy on Ezekiel and said, “Okay, I’ll let you use cow’s dung instead of human dung.”

In **verses 16-17**, God said but I am going to judge Israel and Jerusalem. They are going to experience horrible things and I will let them waste away in their iniquity. So even though I won't make you use human dung, you tell them that. This is all a sign of what I am about to do to my own people because she is so perverse.

One of the saddest things to see is when people who are outside of the church often times have better morals than people inside the church. It is sad when God lets people who do not know Him seemingly experience better things than those who do.

Now why would God go to all of the trouble to give Israel this visual aid? Only one answer—He is trying to get her to admit her sin and turn to Him. But to this day, she still has not done this.

We believe the ultimate fulfillment of these predictions will occur in the final 3 ½ years of the Great Tribulation. During that time Israel will just be trying to survive. She is missing out right now on the blessings of God because of her rebellion. She refuses to turn to Jesus Christ her Messiah, but one day she will.

This is the tragedy for many of God's people. They miss out on the blessings of God because of rebellion. May God always keep us sensitive to Him and His will.