

EZEKIEL 4

THE ORIGINAL “EZEKIEL BREAD”

Ezekiel was living among the exiles in Babylon; but even in that land of their captivity, they still had Jerusalem upon their hearts. The pious captives looked toward it with an eye of faith (Dan. 6:10); but the presumptuous ones looked toward it with an eye of pride, and flattered themselves with a false conceit that they would shortly return there again. Therefore, in order to take down this presumption, Jehovah gave Ezekiel a very clear and distressing foresight of the besieging of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army – as well as of the calamities which would attend that siege.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to take a flat, earthen tile and draw a picture of Jerusalem upon it. He was to set this picture of the city upon the ground, with an iron pan for its wall. Around this miniature “model” of the city, he was to build a little fort, in the shape of the forts which soldiers in those days would build around cities that they besieged. Then Ezekiel was to lie down on the ground, upon his side, before this model of the besieged city; and there he was to stay for many days. This was to represent the Babylonian army lying around the city, in order to keep up a blockade around it – thereby keeping food from going in, and the people from going out. Ezekiel was to lie on his left side for 390 days, which represented the 390 years of sin and iniquity which the Northern Kingdom of Israel was guilty of – beginning in 975 BC, when they first rebelled against the family of King David; up until the year that Jerusalem fell, which completed the ruin of those small remnants of that Northern Kingdom that had incorporated themselves with Judah. After the 390 days were up, Ezekiel was to lie upon his right side for 40 days – thereby bearing the iniquity of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, during the last 40 years before the fall of Jerusalem; counting from the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah, when Jeremiah began to prophesy (Jer. 1:1-2).

The prophet’s “mock siege” of Jerusalem was intended to bring his countrymen to repentance. It was designed to show them their sin, which was the provoking cause of the destruction of their city. “Look here,” says he, “and see what bad results sin brings. What an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God! This comes from sin; and therefore, that ought to be the daily theme of your sorrow and shame now in your captivity, so that you may make your peace with God, and so that He may return in mercy to you.”

But lying upon his side was not all that Ezekiel was obliged to do during the days of his “mock siege.” In order to give the people an idea of the terrible

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The siege against Jerusalem is signified by the prophet’s “mock siege” of a picture of the city, and by his lying upon his side for a number of days – verses 1-8
- ❖ The famine that would rage within the city is represented by his eating very coarse bread, and only a very little portion of it – verses 9-17

famine that would rage in Jerusalem during the siege, he was to confine himself to coarse fare and small rations; for they would lack both food and fuel. His bread was to be of the worst kind, for there would not be enough of any single kind of grain to make a loaf of bread with. Instead, he was to make a mixture of just a little wheat and barley; and the rest of the ingredients were comprised of such things as beans, lentils, and millet. This would only make a poor-quality loaf of bread, which would barely be nutritious enough to keep a person alive. And what made it worse was that even this rough bread would have to be rationed. The besieged people in Jerusalem would be reduced to short allowances, until all the food in the city was used up. Ezekiel was only allowed to eat about eight ounces (227 grams) of this bread every day, and he could only drink about ½ pint (237 mL) of water.

As if this was not bad enough, the prophet was to use man's dung as fuel for cooking this bread. The thought of it would almost turn one's stomach. Yet he was obliged to publicly fulfill this nauseous piece of cookery in the people's sight, so that they would understand that in the extremity of the famine, they would not only have nothing that was dainty, but also nothing that was clean. The prophet did humbly petition the Lord that this disgusting part of the symbolism might be dispensed with, for it would involve ceremonial pollution according to Jewish law. And since Ezekiel's conscience was tender on this point, God allowed him to substitute cow's dung in this matter.

The meaning of all of this prophetic symbolism was that those who remained in Jerusalem would be brought to extreme misery because of the lack of food. And it was sin that would bring all this misery upon them. They would consume away in their iniquity; they would remain hardened and impenitent, and they would die in their sins. Thus we see what woeful work sin makes among a people, and we must acknowledge the righteous judgment of God therein.

As we read of these sad consequences that befell the Lord's ancient people, let us consider the abundance of reasons we have to bless God for the plenty that we enjoy! Not only are we blessed with the fruits of this earth, but we also appreciate the freedom of commerce. The farmer can have money for his bread, and the tradesman can have bread for his money. And even more importantly than that, how can we think of these abundant temporal blessings without being led to remember that Christ, the Bread of Life, pours out an even greater abundance of spiritual blessings upon us? May the Holy Spirit give us our daily portion of this living Bread that comes down from heaven!

Lord, we acknowledge that our sins are the provoking cause of Your chastising hand upon us. We pray for grace to be at peace with You! Be merciful to us, O Lord. Amen.

