

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 4

This chapter contains a prophecy of the siege of Jerusalem, and of the famine that attended it. The siege is described by a portrait of the city of Jerusalem on a tile, laid before the prophet, (²⁹⁰¹Ezekiel 4:1); by each of the actions, representing a siege of it, as building a fort, casting a mount, and setting a camp and battering rams against it, and an iron pan for a wall, between the prophet, the besieger, and the city, (²⁹⁰²Ezekiel 4:2,3); by his gesture, lying first on his left side for the space of three hundred ninety days, and then on his right side for the space of forty days, pointing at the time when the city should be taken, (²⁹⁰³Ezekiel 4:4-6); and by setting his face to the siege, and uncovering his arm, and prophesying, (²⁹⁰⁷Ezekiel 4:7); and by bands being laid on him, so that he could not turn from one side to the other, till the siege was ended, (²⁹⁰⁸Ezekiel 4:8); the famine is signified by bread the prophet was to make of various sorts of grain and seeds, baked with men's dung, and eaten by weight, with water drunk by measure, which is applied unto the people; it is suggested that this would be fulfilled by the children of Israel's eating defiled bread among the Gentiles, (²⁹⁰⁹Ezekiel 4:9-13); but upon the prophet's concern about eating anything forbidden by the law, which he had never done, cow's dung is allowed instead of men's, to prepare the bread with, (²⁹¹⁴Ezekiel 4:14,15); and the chapter is concluded with a resolution to bring a severe famine on them, to their great astonishment, and with which they should be consumed for their iniquity, (²⁹¹⁶Ezekiel 4:16,17).

Ver. 1. *Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile*, &c.] Or "brick"^{f72}. The Targum renders it, a "stone"; but a tile or brick, especially one that is not dried and burned, but green, is more fit to cut in it the figure of a city. Some think that this was ordered because cities are built of brick; or to show the weakness of the city of Jerusalem, how easily it might be demolished; and Jerom thinks there was some design to lead the Jews to reflect upon their making bricks in Egypt, and their hard service there; though perhaps the truer reason may be, because the Babylonians had been used to write upon tiles. Epigenes^{f73} says they had celestial observations of

a long course of years, written on tiles; hence the prophet is bid to describe Jerusalem on one, which was to be destroyed by the king of Babylon;

and lay it before thee: as persons do, who are about to draw a picture, make a portrait, or engrave the form of anything they intend:

and portray upon it the city; [even] Jerusalem; or engrave upon it, by making incisions on it, and so describing the form and figure of the city of Jerusalem.

Ver. 2. *And lay siege against it, &c.*] In his own person, as in (^{צוהב}Ezekiel 4:3); or draw the form of a siege, or figure of an army besieging a city; or rather of the instruments and means used in a siege, as follows:

and build a fort against it: Kimchi interprets it a wooden tower, built over against the city, to subdue it; Jarchi takes it to be an instrument by which stones were cast into the city; and so the Arabic version renders it, “machines to cast stones”; the Targum, a fortress; so Nebuchadnezzar in reality did what was here only done in type, (^{צוהב}2 Kings 25:1); where the same word is used as here:

and cast a mound about it; a heap of earth cast up, in order to look into the city, cast in darts, and mount the walls; what the French call “bastion”, as Jarchi observes:

set the camp also against it; place the army in their tents about it:

and set [battering] rams against it round about; a warlike instrument, that had an iron head, and horns like a ram, with which in a siege the walls of a city were battered and beaten down. Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech, interpret the word of princes and generals of the army, who watched at the several corners of the city, that none might go in and out; so the Targum seems to understand it^{f74}. The Arabic version is, “mounts to cast darts”; (see Gill on “^{צוהב}Ezekiel 21:22”).

Ver. 3. *Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, &c.*] Which Kimchi thinks, for its metal, represented the hardness of the hearts of the people of Israel; and, for its colour, the blackness of their sins: though others are of opinion, this being a pan in which things are fried, it may signify the miseries of the Jews in captivity; the roasting of Ahab and Zedekiah in the fire, and particularly the burning of the city: others, the wrath of God

against them, and his resolution to destroy them: but rather, since the use of it was as follows,

and set it [for] a wall of iron between thee and the city, it seems to represent all such things as are made use of by besiegers to screen them from the besieged; such as are now used are trenches, parapets, bastions, &c. for the prophet in this type is the besieger, representing the Chaldean army secure from the annoyance of those within the walls of the city:

and set thy face against it; with a firm resolution to besiege and take the city; which denotes both the settled wrath of God against this people, and the determined purpose of the king of Babylon not to move from it until he had taken it:

and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it; as an emblem of the army of the Chaldeans besieging it, which is confirmed by the next clause:

this [shall be] a sign to the house of Israel; of the city of Jerusalem being besieged by the Babylonians; this was a sign representing it, and giving them assurance of it.

Ver. 4. *Lie thou also upon thy left side*, &c.] Some think this was not in reality, but in vision, as Kimchi observes; and so Maimonides^{f75}; and in like manner they understand his eating and drinking by measures and preparing food, as he is directed in a following part of this chapter: but others are of opinion that all this was really done. The reasons given on both sides are not despicable. It is urged against the reality of the fact, that the prophet, without a miracle, could never have lain so long on one side; and besides, this seems to be contradicted by a later account, of his sitting in his house before the expiration of those days; since from the fifth day of the fourth month of the fifth year, in which he began to prophesy, (^{<BOOK>}Ezekiel 1:1,2), (and this order was seven days after that at least, (^{<BOOK>}Ezekiel 3:15)), to the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year, when we find him sitting, (^{<BOOK>}Ezekiel 8:1); were but four hundred and thirteen days; and if seven are taken out from thence, there are but four hundred and six; whereas the whole time of his lying for Israel and Judah were four hundred and thirty; and it is further observed, that it does not seem decent that the prophet should be obliged really to eat such bread as he was ordered to make. On the other hand it is observed, that the order of portraying the siege of Jerusalem on a the, and setting an iron pan for a wall, seem to direct to the

doing of real facts, and to that this order is subjoined, without any mark of distinction; besides, the prophet was to have this portrait in view, while he was lying on his side, and uncover his arms, which seem to denote real facts: and was to prophesy, not by words, for he was to be dumb, (^{<3185>}Ezekiel 3:26); but by facts; and he was to do all this in the sight of his people; and if the order to make a cake of bread was not to be really performed in the manner directed, there would have been no occasion of deprecating it. The learned Witsius¹⁷⁶, who has collected the arguments on both sides, is inclined to the latter; and observes from others, that some persons have lain longer on one side than the prophet, without a miracle: particularly a certain paralytic nobleman, who lay sixteen years in such a manner: and as for the computation of time, Cocceius is of opinion that the forty days for Judah are included in the three hundred and ninety for Israel; and which indeed seem to be the whole number, (^{<3009>}Ezekiel 4:9); and which at once solves the difficulty; and besides, the force of the objection may be taken off by observing, that the fifth year might be intercalated, and consist of thirteen months, which was common with the Jews to have a “Veadar”, or intercalated month: nor is it dishonourable nor unusual for the Lord to call his dear servants sometimes to hard and disagreeable service, as both these cases seem to be, when he has ends of his own glory, and the good of others, to be answered thereby. And the lying on the left side for the sins of the house of Israel was, as Jarchi thinks, because that Samaria, which was the head of the ten tribes, lay to the left of Jerusalem: see (^{<3166>}Ezekiel 16:46); or rather, because the left hand is not so honourable as the right; it may show that the Lord had not such an esteem for Israel as for Judah;

and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it; not to atone for it, but to show what was the cause of their captivity; for herein the prophet was no type of Christ, but represented the people of Israel; who had been grievously sinning against God, during the term of time hereafter mentioned, and now would be punished for it; for by “iniquity” is meant the punishment of it, which is often the sense of the word used; (see ^{<0043>}Genesis 4:13);

[according] to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity: which are particularly declared in (^{<3005>}Ezekiel 4:5).

Ver. 5. *For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, &c.*] Or the iniquity which for so many years they have been guilty of; that is, the punishment of it:

according to the number of the days; a day for a year;

three hundred and ninety days; which signify three hundred and ninety years; and so many years there were from the revolt of the ten tribes from Rehoboam, and the setting up the calves at Daniel and Bethel, to the destruction of Jerusalem; which may be reckoned thus: the apostasy was in the fourth year of Rehoboam, so that there remained thirteen years of his reign, for he reigned seventeen years; Abijah his successor reigned three years; Asa, forty one; Jehoshaphat, twenty five; Joram, eight; Ahaziah, one; Athaliah, seven; Joash, forty; Amaziah, twenty nine: Uzziah, fifty two; Jotham, sixteen; Ahaz, sixteen; Hezekiah, twenty nine; Manasseh, fifty five; Amos, two; Josiah, thirty one; Jehoahaz, three months; Jehoiakim, eleven years; Jeconiah, three months and ten days; and Zedekiah, eleven years; in all three hundred and ninety years. Though Grotius reckons them from the fall of Solomon to the carrying captive of the ten tribes by Shalmaneser. According to Jerom, both the three hundred and ninety days, and the forty days, were figurative of the captivities of Israel and Judah. The captivity of Israel, or the ten tribes, began under Pekah king of Israel, (^{<1153>}1 Kings 15:29); when many places in the kingdom were wasted; from whence, to the fortieth year of Ahasuerus, when the Jews were entirely set at liberty, were three hundred and ninety years¹⁷⁷; and the captivity of Judah began in the first year of Jeconiah, which, to the first of Cyrus, were forty years. The Jewish writers make these years to be the time of the idolatry of these people in their chronicle¹⁷⁸ they say, from hence we learn that Israel provoked the Lord to anger, from the time they entered into the land until they went out of it, three hundred and ninety years. Which, according to Jarchi and Kimchi, are, to be reckoned partly in the times of the judges, and partly in the times of the kings of Israel; in the times of the former, a hundred and eleven years: from Micah, till the ark was carried captive in the days of Eli, forty years; and from the time of Jeroboam to Hoshea, two hundred and forty; which make three hundred and ninety one: but the last of Hoshea is not of the number, since it was in the ninth year of his reign the city of Samaria was taken. So Jarchi. Kimchi's reckoning is different. Abarbinel is of opinion that these years describe the four hundred and thirty years of Israel's bondage in Egypt; though, he says, they may be understood of the time of the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam,

from whence, to the destruction of Jerusalem, were three hundred and ninety years; which sense is best, and is what is first given;

so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel; as many days as answer to these years; by the house of Israel is meant not merely the ten tribes, who had been carried captive long before this time, but such of them also as were mixed with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Ver. 6. *And when thou hast accomplished them*, &c.] The three hundred and ninety days, by lying so long on the left side, bearing the sins of the house of Israel in this way; or, as Cocceius renders the words, “and thou shalt accomplish them, and thou shalt lie”, &c.^{f79}, that is, thou shalt so accomplish these days, that thou mayest lie through forty days on the right hand, and then make bare thine arm, and prophesy against Jerusalem; for he thinks the forty days are part of the three hundred and ninety, as before observed: and so Piscator’s note is, “when thou shalt accomplish”, &c. namely, when there shall remain yet forty days, as appears by comparing (²³⁰⁴⁹Ezekiel 4:9) with this verse and (²³⁰⁴⁵Ezekiel 4:5); so Polanus interprets the passage: then

lie again on thy right side; that is, for Judah; which tribe, as Jarchi observes, lay to the south, and so to the right of Jerusalem; (see ²³⁰⁶⁶Ezekiel 16:46); or rather the prophet lay on the right side for Judah, because more honourable, and in greater esteem with the Lord; nor were their sins so many, or continued in so long as those of the ten tribes; and therefore they, and the punishment of them, are borne a less time by the prophet, as follows:

and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: which some think answers to the forty years of Manasseh’s evil reign; others reckon from the thirteenth of Josiah to the end of Zedekiah, and others from the eighteenth of Josiah to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was five years after the carrying of Zedekiah captive:

I have appointed thee each day for a year; which is not only the key for the understanding of the forty days, but also the three hundred and ninety.

Ver. 7. *Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege at Jerusalem*, &c.] All the while he was lying either on the left side or the right, his face was to be directed to the siege of Jerusalem, portrayed upon the tile, and to all the preparations made for that purpose, to show that all had reference to that and that it would certainly be; for, as the prophet represented the

Chaldean army the directing and setting his face to the siege shows their resolution and inflexibleness, that they were determined upon taking the city, and nothing should divert them from it:

and thine arm [shall be] uncovered; which was usual in fighting in those times and countries; for, wearing long garments, they were obliged to turn them up on the arm, or lay them aside, that they might more expeditiously handle their weapons, and engage with the enemy: in this form the soldiers in Trajan's column are figured fighting; and it is related that the Africans used to fight with their arms uncovered^{f80}; thus Scanderbeg in later times used to fight the Turks. The design of the phrase is to show how ready, diligent, and expeditious, the Chaldeans would be in carrying on the siege. The Targum renders it,

“thou shalt strengthen thine arm;”

and so do the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions:

and thou shall prophesy against it: meaning not so much by words, if at all, but by these actions, gestures, and habit; for they all foretold what would certainly come to pass.

Ver. 8. *And, behold, I will lay hands upon thee*, &c.] 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 shall 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, (^{<1271>}2 Kings 25:1-4); but the siege being raised by the army of the king of Egypt for some time, (^{<2576>}Jeremiah 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.

Ver. 9. *Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, &c.*] The first of these was commonly used to make bread of; in case of want and poverty, barley was used; but, for the rest, they were for cattle, and never used for the food of men but in a time of great scarcity; wherefore this was designed to denote the famine that should attend the siege of Jerusalem; (see ^{<1273>}2 Kings 25:3);

and put them in one vessel; that is, the flour of them, when ground, in order to be mixed and kneaded together, and make one dough thereof; which mixed bread was a sign of a sore famine: the Septuagint call it an earthen vessel; a kneading trough seems to be designed:

and make thee bread thereof, [according] to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side; the left side, on which he was to lie three hundred and ninety days: and so as much bread was to be made as would suffice for that time; or so many loaves were to be made as there were days, a loaf for a day:

three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof; no mention is made of the forty days, perhaps they are understood, a part being put for the whole; or they were included in the three hundred and ninety days. The Septuagint and Arabic versions read only a hundred and ninety days.

Ver. 10. *And thy meat which thou shall eat [shall be] by weight, twenty shekels a day, &c.*] To eat bread by weight was a sign of a grievous famine; (see ^{<1335>}Leviticus 26:26); a shekel, according to Josephus^{f81}, weighed four Attic drachms, or half an ounce, wherefore twenty shekels weighed ten ounces; so that the bread the prophet had to eat was but ten ounces a day:

from time to time shall thou eat it; at the certain time of eating, or but once a day; from a set time in one day to the same in another; as from morning to morning, or from noon to noon, or from evening to evening; (see ~~28721~~Jeremiah 37:21).

Ver. 11. *Thou shall drink also water by measure*, &c.] Not wine, but water; and this not as much as he would, but a certain measure; which shows great want of it, and expresses a very distressed condition (see ~~28721~~Lamentations 5:4);

the sixth part of an hin; a hin held twelve logs, or seventy two egg shells, or about three quarts of our measure; and the sixth part of one were two logs, or twelve egg shells, and about a pint of our measure; so that it was but a pint of water a day that the prophet was allowed, as a token of the great scarcity of it in the siege of Jerusalem:

from time to time shalt thou drink: as before.

Ver. 12. *And thou shalt eat it [as] barley cakes*, &c.] That is, the bread made of wheat, barley, beans, lentiles, millet, and fitches, was to be made in the form of barley cakes, and to be baked as they; not in an oven, but under ashes; and these ashes not of wood, or straw, or turf, but as follows:

and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of men, in their sight: the prophet was to take human dung, and dry it, and then cover the cakes or loaves of his mixed bread with it, and burn it over them, and with it bake it; which must be a very disagreeable task to him, and make the food very nauseous, both to himself and to the Jews, in whose sight it was done; and this shows scarcity of fuel, and the severity of the famine; that they had not fuel to bake with, or could not stay till it was baked in an oven, and therefore took this method; as well as points at what they were to eat when carried captive, as follows:

Ver. 13. *And the Lord said, even thus shall the children of Israel*, &c.] Not the ten tribes only, or those who were among the other two, but all the Jews in captivity:

eat the defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them; so called, not because mixed, but baked in the above manner; which was a symbol of the defilements which they should contract upon various accounts, by dwelling among the Gentiles; so that this foretells their captivity; their pollution among the nations of the world; and that they

should not be the holy people to the Lord they had been, and had boasted of. The Jews^{f82} cite this passage to prove that he that eats bread without drying his hands is as if he ate defiled bread.

Ver. 14. *Then said I, ah, Lord God!* &c.] The interjection “ah” is expressive of sighing and groaning, as Jarchi; or of deprecation, as the Targum, which paraphrases it,

““and I said”, receive my prayer, O Lord God:”

behold, my soul hath not been polluted; not meaning that his soul had not been polluted with sin, or with an evil thought, as Kimchi interprets it; but by his soul he means the inward part of his body, his stomach and belly; which had not been defiled by taking in meats which were unclean by the law, as follows:

for from my youth up, even till now, have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; these were forbidden to be eaten by the law; and such that did were defiled, and obliged to bathing in water, (⁴⁸⁷⁵Leviticus 17:15,16); and from those the priests more especially were careful to abstain, as Kimchi observes; and such an one was the prophet; (see ⁴⁴⁰⁴Acts 10:14);

neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth; corrupt or, putrefied, or whatsoever was unclean by law, as swine’s flesh, or any other. The argument is, that since he had never eaten of anything forbidden by the law of God, he could by no means think of eating that which was abhorrent to nature; as bread baked with men’s dung was.

Ver. 15. *Then he said to me,* &c.] The Lord hearkened to the prophet’s prayer and argument, and makes some abatement and alteration in the charge he gave him:

lo, I have given thee cow’s dung for man’s dung: that is, allowed him to make use of the one instead of the other, in baking his mingled bread:

thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith; having gathered cow’s dung, and dried it, he was to burn it, and bake his bread with it, which is meant by preparing it. In some parts of our nation, where fuel is scarce, cow’s dung is made use of; it is gathered and plastered on the walls of houses, and, being dried in clots, is taken and burnt.

Ver. 16. *Moreover he said unto me, son of man, &c.*] What follows opens the design, and shows what was intended by the symbol of the miscellany bread, baked with cow dung, the prophet was to eat by measure, as, well as drink water by measure: namely, the sore famine that should be in Jerusalem at the time of the siege:

behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: that is, take away bread, which is the staff of life, the support of it, and which strengthens man's heart; and also the nourishing virtue and efficacy from what they had. The sense is, that the Lord would both deprive them of a sufficiency of bread, the nourishment of man; and not suffer the little they had to be nourishing to them; what they ate would not satisfy them, nor do them much good; (see ^{<RB>}Leviticus 26:26 ^{<RB>}Isaiah 3:1);

and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; that they might not eat too much at a time, but have something for tomorrow; and to cause their little stock to last the longer, not knowing how long the siege would be:

and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment; that such a judgment should fall upon them, who thought themselves the people of God, and the favourites of heaven.

Ver. 17. *That they may want bread and water, &c.*] Or, "because they shall want"^{f83} &c. therefore they shall eat the one, and drink the other, by weight; or they shall do this till there shall be none to eat and drink:

and be astonished one with another; when they shall find they cannot relieve one another; and not knowing what method to take for the support of nature:

and consume away for their iniquity; their flesh upon them black through famine, putrid and noisome; and they wasting, pining, and consuming; reduced to skin and bones; and disagreeable to look upon; and all because of their sins and iniquities.