

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 9-Chapter Four (Ezekiel 4:1-17)

Executive Summary

Ezekiel is commissioned as an obligatory steward of God's message, tasked with performing grueling physical demonstrations to represent the "iniquity" (depravity) of the nation. These demonstrations focus on two primary outcomes: the tactical reality of the coming siege and the horrific famine and ritual uncleanness that will follow. The document outlines the specific physical requirements, linguistic nuances of the Hebrew text, and the theological implications of Ezekiel's actions.

I. The Prophet's Commission and Stewardship

Ezekiel's role is defined by a "stewardship" that carries severe consequences; failure to complete his divine tasks would result in punishment from God. His mission is characterized by:

- **Shock and Awe:** His actions are intended to provoke a reaction among the exiles.
- **Divine Guidance:** The LORD personally directs and guides Ezekiel's speech and physical movements.
- **Personal Endurance:** Ezekiel is required to physically manifest the suffering and judgment of the people through his own body.

II. Prophetic Demonstration #1: The Symbolic Siege

The first demonstration uses a scale model to communicate the certainty and tactical nature of the coming judgment against Jerusalem.

Tactical Modeling

Ezekiel was commanded to perform the following actions:

- **The Inscription:** Using a brick, he was to "inscribe" (*ḥāqāq*—meaning to cut in or trace) the word "Jerusalem."
- **The Siege Works:** He was to build a miniature siege wall, raise a ramp, pitch camps, and place battering rams around the brick.
- **The Iron Barrier:** An iron plate was set up as a wall between Ezekiel and the brick (the city), signifying an impenetrable barrier during the siege.
- **The Siege Stance:** Ezekiel was directed to set his face toward the city as if besieging it.

The Bearing of Iniquity

A significant portion of this prophecy involved Ezekiel's physical posture, which served as a chronological representation of Israel and Judah's rebellion:

- **The Left Side (Israel):** Ezekiel lay on his left side for **390 days**, corresponding to the 390 years of the house of Israel's iniquity.
- **The Right Side (Judah):** After completing the first period, he lay on his right side for **40 days**, representing 40 years of Judah's depravity.
- **The Ropes:** The Word of the LORD personally placed ropes on Ezekiel to ensure he could not turn from one side to the other until the days of the siege were fulfilled.

III. Linguistic Insight: "Iniquity" and "Sign"

Hebrew Term	Transliteration	Meaning/Context
ת	<i>ōt/oth</i>	A "sign" or "signal." In this context, it is a signpost meant to guide the thinking and conduct of the exiles.
עון	<i>āwōn/awvone</i>	"Iniquity." Underscores the depravity committed against the Law of Moses; this term appears 44 times in Ezekiel, more than any other book.

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IV. Prophetic Demonstration #2: Famine and Defilement

The second demonstration focused on the physical impact of the siege, specifically the scarcity of food and water and the loss of ritual purity.

The "4:9" Bread and Water Rations

Ezekiel was commanded to create a specific multi-grain bread to be consumed meagerly throughout his 390-day demonstration.

- **Ingredients:** Wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt.
- **Daily Food Ration:** 20 shekels (approximately 6–10 ounces or 180–280 grams).
- **Daily Water Ration:** 1/6th of a hin (approximately 3 cups or 0.8 quarts).
- **Frequency:** The phrase *'et 'ad 'et* ("from time to time") emphasizes that consumption would be infrequent and meager.

The Fuel and the Petition

The most controversial aspect of this demonstration involved the fuel used to bake the bread:

- **Initial Command:** Ezekiel was told to bake the bread over human dung in the sight of the exiles.
- **The Purpose:** This signified that the sons of Israel would eat "unclean" bread among the nations where they would be banished, as those nations did not follow the Law of Moses.
- **Ezekiel's Petition:** As a priest who had never been defiled by unclean meat or carcasses, Ezekiel pleaded with God for an alternative.
- **Divine Compromise:** The LORD allowed Ezekiel to use cow's dung in place of human excrement to prepare his bread, easing his concerns regarding ritual defilement.

V. Psychological and Physical Impact: Anxiety and Horror

The final verses of Chapter 4 (16–17) explain the ultimate goal of these "signposts." God declared he would "break the staff of bread" in Jerusalem, leading to:

1. **Anxiety (*'d'āgā*):** From the root meaning "afraid" or "fear," this describes the careful, fearful weighing of meager rations.
2. **Horror (*šimmāmôn*):** Meaning "astonishment" or "bewilderment," this refers to the state of the people as they see one another waste away during the famine.
3. **Wasting Away:** The people would be appalled by one another and perish due to their iniquity.

VI. Conclusion

Chapter 4 serves as a comprehensive warning to the exiles. Through the physical suffering and restricted diet of the prophet Ezekiel, the LORD communicated the absolute certainty of the invasion of Jerusalem and the horrific deprivation that would follow as a direct result of the nation's long-standing rebellion against divine statutes.