

# CHAPTER 4

Ezekiel was now among the captives in Babylon, but they there had Jerusalem still upon their hearts; the pious captives looked towards it with an eye of faith (as <sup>2760</sup>Daniel 6:10), the presumptuous ones looked towards it with an eye of pride, and flattered themselves with a conceit that they should shortly return thither again; those that remained corresponded with the captives, and, it is likely, bouyed them up with hopes that all would be well yet, as long as Jerusalem was standing in its strength, and perhaps upbraided those with their folly who had surrendered at first; therefore, to take down this presumption, God gives the prophet, in this chapter, a very clear and affecting foresight of the besieging of Jerusalem by the Chaldean army and the calamities which would attend that siege. Two things are here represented to him in vision: —

**I.** The fortifications that should be raised against the city; this is signified by the prophet's laying siege to the portraiture of Jerusalem (v. 1-3) and laying first on one side and then on the other side before it (v. 4-8).

**II.** The famine that should rage within the city; this is signified by his eating very coarse fare, and confining himself to a little of it, so long as this typical representation lasted (v. 9-17).

## <sup>2800</sup>EZEKIEL 4:1-8

### THE REPRESENTATION OF A SIEGE

The prophet is here ordered to represent to himself and others by signs which would be proper and powerful to strike the fancy and to affect the mind, *the siege of Jerusalem*; and this amounted to a prediction.

**I.** He was ordered to engrave a draught of Jerusalem upon a tile, v. 1. It was Jerusalem's honour that while she kept her integrity God had *graven her upon the palms of his hands* (<sup>2806</sup>Isaiah 49:16), and the names of the tribes were engraven in precious stones on the breast-plate of the high priest; but, now that *the faithful city has become a harlot*, a worthless

brittle tile or brick is thought good enough to *portray it upon*. This the prophet must lay before him, that the eye may affect the heart.

**II.** He was ordered to build little forts against this portraiture of the city, resembling the batteries raised by the besiegers, v. 2. Between the city that was besieged and himself that was the besieger he was to set up an *iron pan*, as an *iron wall*, v. 3. This represented the inflexible resolution of both sides; the Chaldeans resolved, whatever it cost them, that they would make themselves masters of the city and would never quit it till they had conquered it; on the other side, the Jews resolved never to capitulate, but to hold out to the last extremity.

**III.** He was ordered to lie upon his side before it, as it were to surround it, representing the Chaldean army lying before it to block it up, to keep the meat from going in and the mouths from going out. He was to lie on his left side 390 *days* (v. 5), about thirteen months; the siege of Jerusalem is computed to last eighteen months (<sup>2514</sup>Jeremiah 52:4-6), but if we deduct from that five months' interval, when the besiegers withdrew upon the approach of Pharaoh's army (<sup>2515</sup>Jeremiah 37:5-8), the number of the days of the close siege will be 390. Yet that also had another signification. The 390 days, according to the prophetic dialect, signified 390 years; and, when the prophet lies so many days on his side, he bears the guilt of that iniquity which *the house of Israel*, the ten tribes, had borne 390 years, reckoning from their first apostasy under Jeroboam to the destruction of Jerusalem, which completed the ruin of those small remains of them that had incorporated with Judah. He is then to lie forty days *upon his right side*, and so long to bear *the iniquity of the house of Judah*, the kingdom of the two tribes, because the measure-filling sins of that people were those which they were guilty of during the last forty years before their captivity, since the thirteenth year of Josiah, when Jeremiah began to prophesy (<sup>2516</sup>Jeremiah 1:1, 2), or, as some reckon it, since the eighteenth, when the book of the law was found and the people renewed their covenant with God. When they persisted in their impieties and idolatries, notwithstanding they had such a prophet and such a prince, and were brought into the bond of such a covenant, what could be expected but ruin without remedy? Judah, that had such helps and advantages for reformation, fills the measure of its iniquity in less time than Israel does. Now we are not to think that the prophet lay constantly night and day upon his side, but every day, for so many days together, at a certain time of the

day, when he received visits, and company came in, he was found lying 390 days on his left side and forty days on his right side before his portraiture of Jerusalem, which all that saw might easily understand to mean the close besieging of that city, and people would be flocking in daily, some for curiosity and some for conscience, at the hour appointed, to see it and to take their different remarks upon it. His being found constantly on the same side, as if *bands were laid upon him* (as indeed they were by the divine command), so that he could not *turn himself from one side to another till he had ended the days of the siege*, did plainly represent the close and constant continuance of the besiegers about the city during that number of days, till they had gained their point.

**IV.** He was ordered to prosecute the siege with vigour (v. 7): *Thou shalt set thy face towards the siege of Jerusalem*, as wholly intent upon it and resolved to carry it; so the Chaldeans would be, and neither bribed nor forced to withdraw from it. Nebuchadnezzar's indignation at Zedekiah's treachery in breaking his league with him made him very furious in pushing on this siege, that he might chastise the insolence of that faithless prince and people; and his army promised themselves a rich booty of that pompous city; so that both set their faces against it, for they were very resolute. Nor were they less active and industrious, exerting themselves to the utmost in all the operations of the siege, which the prophet was to represent by the *uncovering of his arm*, or, as some read it, the *stretching out* of his arm, as it were to deal blows about without mercy. When God is about to do some great work he is said to *make bare his arm*, <sup><350></sup>Isaiah 52:10. In short, The Chaldeans will go about their business, and go on in it, as men in earnest, who resolve to go through with it. Now,

**1.** This is intended to be a *sign to the house of Israel* (v. 3), both to those in Babylon, who were eye-witnesses of what the prophet did, and to those also who remained in their own land, who would hear the report of it. The prophet was *dumb* and *could not speak* (<sup><365></sup>Ezekiel 3:26); but as his silence had a voice, and upbraided the people with their deafness, so even then God *left not himself without witness*, but ordered him to make signs, as dumb men are accustomed to do, and as Zacharias did when he was dumb, and by them to *make known his mind* (that is, the mind of God) to the people. And thus likewise the people were upbraided with their stupidity and dulness, that they were not capable of being taught as men of sense are, by words, but must be taught as children are, by pictures, or as deaf men are, by signs. Or, perhaps, they are hereby upbraided with their

malice against the prophet. Had he spoken in words at length what was signified by these figures, they would have entangled him in his talk, would have indicted him for treasonable expressions, for they knew how to *make a man an offender for a word* (<sup>2301</sup>Isaiah 29:21), to avoid which he is ordered to make use of signs. Or the prophet made use of signs for the same reason that Christ made use of parables, that *hearing they might hear and not understand, and seeing they might see and not perceive*, <sup>4134</sup>Matthew 13:14, 15. They would not understand what was plain, and therefore shall be taught by that which is difficult; and herein the Lord was righteous.

**2.** Thus the prophet *prophesies against Jerusalem* (v. 7); and there were those who not only understood it so, but were the more affected with it by its being so represented, for images to the eye commonly make deeper impressions upon the mind than words can, and for this reason sacraments are instituted to represent divine things, that we might see and believe, might see and be affected with those things; and we may expect this benefit by them, and a blessing to go along with them, while (as the prophet here) we make use only of such signs as God himself has expressly appointed, which, we must conclude, are the fittest. Note, The power of imagination, if it be rightly used, and kept under the direction and correction of reason and faith, may be of good use to kindle and excite pious and devout affections, as it was here to Ezekiel and his attendants. “*Methinks I see so and so, myself dying, time expiring, the world on fire, the dead rising, the great tribunal set, and the like, may have an exceedingly good influence upon us: for fancy is like fire, a good servant, but a bad master.*”

**1**This whole transaction has that in it which the prophet might, with a good colour of reason, have hesitated at and excepted against, and yet, in obedience to God's command, and in execution of his office, he did it according to order.

**(1.)** It seemed childish and ludicrous, and beneath his gravity, and there were those that would ridicule him for it; but he knew the divine appointment put honour enough upon that which otherwise seemed mean to save his reputation in the doing of it.

**(2.)** It was toilsome and tiresome to do as he did; but our ease as well as our credit must be sacrificed to our duty, and we must never call God's service in any instance of it a hard service.

(3.) It could not but be very much against the grain with him to appear thus against Jerusalem, the city of God, the holy city, to act as an enemy against a place to which he was so good a friend; but he is a prophet, and must follow his instructions, not his affections, and must plainly preach the ruin of a sinful place, though its welfare is what he passionately desires and earnestly prays for.

4. All this that the prophet sets before the children of his people concerning the destruction of Jerusalem is designed to bring them to repentance, by showing them sin, the provoking cause of this destruction, sin the ruin of that once flourishing city, than which surely nothing could be more effectual to make them hate sin and turn from it; while he thus in lively colours describes the calamity with a great deal of pain and uneasiness to himself, he is *bearing the iniquity of Israel and Judah*. “Look here” (says he) “and see what work sin makes, what an *evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God*; this comes of sin, your sins and the sin of your fathers; let that therefore be the daily matter of your sorrow and shame now in your captivity, that you may make your peace with God and he may return in mercy to you.” But observe, It is a day of punishment for a year of sin: *I have appointed thee each day for a year*. The siege is a calamity of 390 days, in which God reckons for the iniquity of 390 years; justly therefore d they acknowledge that God had *punished them less than their iniquity deserved*, <sup><393></sup>Ezra 9:13. But let impenitent sinners know that, though now God is long-suffering towards them, in the other world there is an everlasting punishment. When God *laid bands* upon the prophet, it was to show them how they were *bound with the cords of their own transgression* (<sup><314></sup>Lamentations 1:14), and therefore they were now *holden in the cords of affliction*. But we may well think of the prophet's case with compassion, when God laid upon him the bands of duty, as he does on all his ministers (<sup><496></sup>1 Corinthians 9:16, *Necessity is laid upon me, and woe unto me if I preach not the gospel*); and yet men laid upon him bonds of restraint (<sup><485></sup>Ezekiel 3:25); but under both it is satisfaction enough that they are serving the interests of God's kingdom among men.

## ~~300~~ EZEKIEL 4:9-17

### THE REPRESENTATION OF A FAMINE

The best exposition of this part of Ezekiel's prediction of Jerusalem's desolation is Jeremiah's lamentation of it, ~~200~~ Lamentations 4:3, 4, etc., and v. 10, where he pathetically describes the terrible famine that was in Jerusalem during the siege and the sad effects of it.

- I.** The prophet here, to affect the people with the foresight of it, must confine himself for 390 days to coarse fare and short commons, and that ill-dressed, for they should want both food and fuel.
- 1.** His meat, for the quality of it, was to be of the worst bread, made of but little wheat and barley, and the rest of beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, such as we feed horses or fatted hogs with, and this mixed, as mill corn, or as that in the beggar's bag, that has a dish full of one sort of corn at one house and of another at another house; of such corn as this must the prophet's bread be made while he underwent the fatigue of lying on his side, and needed something better to support him, v. 9. Note, It is our wisdom not to be too fond of dainties and pleasant bread, because we know not what hard meat we may be tied to, nay, and may be glad of, before we die. The meanest sort of food is better than we deserve, and therefore must not be despised nor wasted, nor must those that use it be looked upon with disdain, because we know not what may be our own lot.
- 2.** For the quantity of it, it was to be of the least that a man could be kept alive with, to signify that the besieged should be reduced to short allowance and should hold out till all *the bread in the city was spent*, ~~250~~ Jeremiah 37:21. The prophet must eat but twenty *shekels'* weight of bread a day (v. 10), that was about ten ounces; and he must drink but the *sixth part of a hin of water*, that was half a pint, about eight ounces, v. 11. The stint of the Lessian diet is fourteen ounces of meat and sixteen of drink. The prophet in Babylon had bread enough and to spare, and was by the river side, where there was plenty of water; and yet, that he might confirm his own prediction and be a sign to the children of Israel, God obliges him to live thus sparingly, and he submits to it. Note, God's servants must learn to endure hardness, and to deny themselves the use of lawful delights, when they may thereby serve the glory of God, evidence

the sincerity of their faith, and express their sympathy with their brethren in affliction. The body must be *kept under and brought into subjection*. Nature is content with a little, grace with less, but lust with nothing. It is good to stint ourselves of choice, that we may the better bear it if ever we should come to be stinted by necessity. And in times of public distress and calamity it ill becomes us to make much of ourselves, as those that *drank wine in bowls and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*, <sup><300></sup>Amos 6:4-6.

**3.** For the dressing of it, he must *bake it with a man's dung* (v. 12); that must be dried, and serve for fuel to heat his oven with. The thought of it would almost turn one's stomach; yet the coarse bread, thus baked, he must *eat as barley-cakes*, as freely as if it were the same bread he had been used to. This nauseous piece of cookery he must exercise publicly *in their sight*, that they might be the more affected with the calamity approaching, which was signified by it, that in the extremity of the famine they should not only have nothing that was dainty, but nothing that was cleanly, about them; they must take up with what they could get. *To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet*. This circumstance of the sign, the baking of his bread with man's dung, the prophet with submission humbly desired might be dispensed with (v. 14); it seemed to have in it something of a ceremonial pollution, for there was a law that man's dung should *be covered with earth*, that God might *see no unclean thing in their camp*, <sup><523></sup>Deuteronomy 23:13, 14. And must he go and gather a thing so offensive, and use it in the dressing of his meat in the sight of the people? “*Ah! Lord God,*” says he, “*behold, my soul has not been polluted*, and I am afraid lest by this it be polluted.” Note, The pollution of the soul by sin is what good people dread more than any thing; and yet sometimes tender consciences fear it without cause, and perplex themselves with scruples about lawful things, as the prophet here, who had not yet learned that it is not that which *goes into the mouth that defiles the man*, <sup><451></sup>Matthew 15:11. But observe he does not plead, “*Lord, from my youth I have been brought up delicately and have never been used to any thing but what was clean and nice*” (and there were those who were so brought up, who in the siege of Jerusalem did *embrace dunghills*, <sup><205></sup>Lamentations 4:5), but that he had been brought up conscientiously, and had never eaten any thing that was forbidden by the law, that *died of itself* or was *torn in pieces*; and therefore, “*Lord, do not put this upon me now.*” Thus Peter pleaded (<sup><404></sup>Acts 10:14), *Lord, I have never eaten any thing that is common or*

*unclean*. Note, it will be comfortable to us, when we are reduced to hardships, if our hearts can witness for us that we have always been careful to abstain from sin, even from little sins, and the *appearances of evil*. Whatever God commands us, we may be sure, is good; but, if we be put upon any thing that we apprehend to be evil, we should argue against it, from this consideration, that hitherto we have preserved our purity — and shall we lose it now? Now, because Ezekiel with a manifest tenderness of conscience made this scruple, God dispensed with him in this matter. Note, Those who have power in their hands should not be rigorous in pressing their commands upon those that are dissatisfied concerning them, yea, though their dissatisfactions be groundless or arising from education and long usage, but should recede from them rather than grieve or offend the weak, or put a stumbling-block before them, in conformity to the example of God's condescension to Ezekiel, though we are sure his authority is incontestable and all his commands are wise and good. God allowed Ezekiel to use *cow's dung* instead of *man's dung*, v. 15. This is a tacit reflection upon man, as intimating that he being polluted with sin his filthiness is more nauseous and odious than that of any other creature. *How much more abominable and filthy is man!* <sup><856></sup>Job 15:16.

**II.** Now this sign is particularly explained here; it signified,

**1.** That those who remained in Jerusalem should be brought to extreme misery for want of necessary food. All supplies being cut off by the besiegers, the city would soon find the want of the country, for *the king himself is served of the field*; and thus *the staff of bread would be broken in Jerusalem*, v. 16. God would not only take away from the bread its power to nourish, so that *they should eat and not be satisfied* (<sup><856></sup>Leviticus 26:26), but would take away the bread itself (<sup><281></sup>Isaiah 3:1), so that what little remained should be *eaten by weight*, so much a day, so much a head, that they might have an equal share and might make it last as long as possible. But to what purpose, when they could not make it last always, and the besieged must be tired out before the besiegers? They should eat and drink *with care*, to make it go as far as might be, and with *astonishment*, when they saw it almost spent and knew not which way to look for a recruit. They should *be astonished one with another*; whereas it is ordinarily some alleviation of a calamity to have others share with us in it (*Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*), and some ease to the spirit to complain of the burden, it should be an aggravation of the misery that it was universal, and their complaining to one another should but make them



all the more uneasy and increase the *astonishment*. And the event shall be as bad as their fears; they cannot make it worse than it is, for *they shall consume away for their iniquity*; multitudes of them shall die of famine, a lingering death, worse than that by *the sword* (<sup><2009></sup>Lamentations 4:9); they shall die so as to *feel themselves die*. And it is sin that brings all this misery upon them: *They shall consume away in their iniquity* (so it may be read); they shall continue hardened and impenitent, and shall die in their sins, which is more miserable than to die on a dunghill. Now,

**(1.)** Let us see here what woeful work sin makes with a people, and acknowledge the righteousness of God herein. Time was when *Jerusalem was filled with the finest of the wheat* (<sup><174></sup>Psalm 147:14); but now it would be glad of the coarsest, and cannot have it. *Fulness of bread*, as it was one of Jerusalem's mercies, so it had become one of her sins, <sup><160></sup>Ezekiel 16:49. The plenty was abused to luxury and excess, which were therefore thus justly punished with famine. It is a righteous thing with God to deprive us of those enjoyments which we have made the food and fuel of our lusts.

**(2.)** Let us see what reason we have to bless God for plenty, not only for the fruits of the earth, but for the freedom of commerce, that the husbandman can have money for his bread and the tradesman bread for his money, that there is abundance not only in the field, but in the market, that those who live in cities and great towns, though they *sow not*, neither do they *reap*, are yet fed from day to day with food convenient.

**2.** It signified that those who were carried into captivity should be forced to *eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles* (v. 13), to eat meat made up by Gentile hands otherwise than according to the law of the Jewish church, which they were always taught to call *defiled*, and which they would have as great an aversion to as a man would have to bread prepared with dung, that is (as perhaps it may be understood) kneaded and moulded with dung. Daniel and his fellows confined themselves to *pulse and water*, rather than they would *eat the portion of the king's meat* assigned them, because they apprehended it would defile them, <sup><008></sup>Daniel 1:8. Or they should be forced to eat putrid meat, such as their oppressors would allow them in their slavery, and such as formerly they would have scorned to touch. Because they *served not God* with cheerfulness in the abundance of all things, God will make them serve their enemies in the want of all things.