

Pentwater Bible Church

Book of Ezekiel

Message 8

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Ezekiel: by Gustave Dore Cir 1832-1883

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Message Eight

God Conditions The Prophet Ezekiel PART II

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GOD PRODUCES EMPATHY FOR HIM IN EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 4:4-17

⁴Moreover lie thou upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it; according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it, thou shalt bear their iniquity. ⁵For I have appointed the years of their iniquity to be unto thee a number of days, even three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. ⁶And again, when thou hast accomplished these, thou shalt lie on thy right side, and shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it unto thee. ⁷And thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with thine arm uncovered; and thou shalt prophesy against it. ⁸And, behold, I lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to the other, till thou hast accomplished the days of thy siege.

⁹Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof; according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, even three hundred and ninety days, shalt thou eat thereof. ¹⁰And thy food which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. ¹¹And thou shalt drink water by measure, the sixth part of a hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. ¹²And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it in their sight with dung that cometh out of man. ¹³And Jehovah said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations whither I will drive them. ¹⁴Then said I, Ah Lord Jehovah! behold, my soul hath not been polluted; for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn of beasts; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. ¹⁵Then he said unto me, See, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread thereon. ¹⁶Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure, and in dismay: ¹⁷that they may want bread and water, and be dismayed one with another, and pine away in their iniquity (ASV, 1901).

LIE ON THE LEFT SIDE FOR ISRAEL

Ezekiel 4:4-5

⁴Moreover lie thou upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it; according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it,

thou shalt bear their iniquity. ⁵For I have appointed the years of their iniquity to be unto thee a number of days, even three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. (ASV, 1901).

God continues to give Ezekiel specific commands for food, posture and endurance so he can identify with God's view of the sins of the Jews toward Him. Sympathy is when one feels for another person. Empathy is much stronger and more personal as one feels with instead of for. God is giving Ezekiel specific commands to force him into an empathetic attitude of God's issue with the vast gross sins of the nation Israel. These verses are directly referring to the ten-tribe confederation specifically called Israel. Due to their sins they were sacked and removed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Ezekiel is essentially going to carry the sins of Israel within himself. In other words this is the time that Israel oppressed the Spirit of God with their sins. In these actions he will clearly identify with the pain that God feels when His children sin and also feel the divine retribution God will extract on the Jews and the pain they will feel as a result of the correction. This is an extension and further clarification of the first symbolic acts depicting the siege of Jerusalem and God distancing Himself from the nation Israel.

Ezekiel was instructed to lie on his left side for 390 days. When Ezekiel lay on his left side he faced north as an indication of North for the Northern ten tribes of Israel. The text does not say that the Prophet should be in that position all the time during the allotted time. He prepared food to eat during these days, which makes it clear that he was to do this enough of the time to make it visible to the Jewish leaders. The Prophet no doubt carried out the divine command as it was conveyed to him, and thereby gave the people a sign concerning their iniquity and the punishment they deserved. We have the written text but not all of the complete interaction between Ezekiel and God.

The general purpose of having Ezekiel doing this was to *bear the iniquity of the house of Israel* as God said. This means to "feel" the punishment that is placed upon the House of Israel. This episode represents Ezekiel as playing in part the role of the scapegoat of the Mosaic Law.

Leviticus 16: 21–22.

²¹and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a man that is in readiness into the wilderness: ²²and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness (ASV, 1901).

Symbolically God lays the guilt of Israel, which is the northern kingdom upon Ezekiel while he, rests on his left side for 390 days. The Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint has a period the 190 days not 390. However, the Dead Sea Scroll of Ezekiel from the same period as the Septuagint (Cir. 200 B.C.) uses the 390 days. If the text of the Septuagint was changed it was probably done in an effort to make more sense out of the 390 days. If so, the translators of the Septuagint also had difficulty interpreting the passage like everyone else. Perhaps God will illuminate this as time moves forward to some future date. Now God says that He has *appointed the years of their iniquity to be*

unto thee a number of days. If the Septuagint is correct then it is easier to establish a timeline. The northern tribes under Jeroboam went into apostasy in approximately 930 B.C. They were carried off by the Assyrian invasion cir. 722 B.C. (209 years). Here in lies the difficulty in placing this number of years on the chronology of the ten tribes of Israel. We do not know when God started the clock to measure the beginning of the sins of the northern ten tribes or which number 190 or 390 is most accurate. All attempts to work out a literal timetable for placement of 390 years prior to the destruction of Israel have never succeeded in producing a workable chronology. Some have suggested a symbolic interpretation but that fails to explain the accuracy of the rest of the prophecies in this book. The literal works best but we just don't know the starting point that God began to assess the national sin of Israel

LIE ON THE RIGHT SIDE FOR JUDAH

Ezekiel 4:6-8

⁶And again, when thou hast accomplished these, thou shalt lie on thy right side, and shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it unto thee. ⁷And thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with thine arm uncovered; and thou shalt prophesy against it. ⁸And, behold, I lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to the other, till thou hast accomplished the days of thy siege (ASV, 1901).

Now God tells him to lie on his *right side, and shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it unto thee.* This would face him south to represent the southern kingdom of Judah. The same difficulties with evaluating forty years prior to the destruction of Judah have never succeeded in producing a workable chronology. Again the problem is one of the starting point that God recognized the national sins of Judah the southern kingdom as being grievous enough to warrant national judgment through an invasion by the Babylonians. In facing to the south from Babylon he would be facing Jerusalem and acknowledging the siege which was to come upon it in 586 B.C.

By having his arm uncovered is indicated readiness or preparation such as rolling up ones sleeves for action. Ezekiel was to be, no spectator of the siege, which he was dramatizing. God wanted him to be involved in His Divine commission to control and guide it. The picture of the Ezekiel's attitude toward all this, is not just resting on his side and folding his hands, like a man relaxing might do, but setting his countenance firmly, with bare outstretched arm, at the drama portrayed by him, have emphasized the startling effect of the whole scene. In this whole time Ezekiel was going to be restrained as a commitment of God to force him into action. He tells Ezekiel that *He lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to the other, till thou hast accomplished the days of thy siege.* The Jewish leaders would get the picture. Whether they would act on this was improbable, as God had called them a rebellious house

The 390 days and 40 days are called *the days of thy siege.* In the next (third) sign Ezekiel rationed his food and water during the time he was lying on his side to depict the scarcity of food during the time of the siege.

THE SIGN OF THE POLLUTED BREAD

Ezekiel 4:9

⁹Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof; according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, even three hundred and ninety days, shalt thou eat thereof (ASV, 1901).

Now this verse introduces several successive symbolic actions relating to food. This one has to do with the quality and scarcity of food that occur during a siege. The bread that God commands Ezekiel to bake is composed of six kinds of grains and legumes, all of which were common both to Babylon and Israel. The outcome of this mixture would be coarse, unpalatable bread. While not specifically made reference to in the Mosaic Law's prohibitions against mixtures of seeds, fruit, fabrics and animals it was in that vein repugnant to the Jews (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9-11). This was to be the prophet's food, as it was to be that of the people of Jerusalem during the siege. The meaning is that food will be hard to come by, and that one must make do with whatever is available. The Babylonian Talmud (*Erubin* 81a) states that an experiment had shown that a dog would not eat bread made in this manner. Therefore this represents low quality food. Even food of this kind, whatever its quality or lack of it, will be severely rationed, as will be water.

EZEKIEL IS INSTRUCTED IN CONSUMING AND BAKING

Ezekiel 4:10-13

¹⁰And thy food which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. ¹¹And thou shalt drink water by measure, the sixth part of a hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. ¹²And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it in their sight with dung that cometh out of man. ¹³And Jehovah said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations whither I will drive them (ASV, 1901).

The fact that Ezekiel was to measure out the quantity of food and water is indicative of the scarcity of food during wartime. The daily ration of food that Ezekiel was to provide for himself weighed *twenty shekels a day*. In modern weight it was about eight ounces. His water ration of *the sixth part of a hin* equaled about two thirds of a quart. The general purpose for this was to demonstrate to the Jewish leaders who visited him in his home of the scarcity of food and water that there would be during Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem as they attempted to starve the Jews out of the city into the hands of the Babylonian army. God commands Ezekiel to eat the bread after he cooked it over dried human excrement, which was to be the fuel. The use of dung in the Middle East was not unusual due to the general scarcity of wood for fuel. Dung contained straw due to the diet of the animal. It was dried and burned giving off a very unpleasant odor. By using human dung the odor would be extremely repulsive and outside the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 14:3) further allowing the Jewish leaders to get a view of what was in store for their colleagues in Jerusalem if they persisted in their sins against God. Ezekiel's action would forecast the future of the exiles, who would be forced to eat food in an unclean foreign

land. Israel for all her sins was to be placed on the same level as the unclean Heathen. Amos vividly captured this issue.

Amos 8:11-13

¹¹Behold, the days come, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah. ¹²And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it. ¹³In that day shall the fair virgins and the young men faint for thirst (ASV, 1901).

God through Ezekiel was casting a strong impression of His attitude with the pollution and uncleanness of the idolatrous practices of worship, which the Jews were practicing. Idolatry is vile in God's sight. Jewish and Christian fellowships that engage in idolatrous practices are in danger of permanent eternal death. Nations endorsing this will suffer similar divine retribution. America and the west are not exceptions. We tend to believe in uniformitarianism and do not think that divine judgment will fall on us.

Idolatry is image-worship or divine honour paid to any created object. Paul describes the origin of idolatry in Romans. ²⁸*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;*" (1:28). This is not appreciation or admiration. It is assigning a deity like admiration to anything other than God

The three basic categories of idolatry are:

1. Fetishism, or the worship of trees, rivers, hills, stones, etc.
2. Nature worship, the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, as the supposed powers of nature.
3. Hero worship, the worship of deceased ancestors, or of heroes.

In Scripture, idolatry came from the satanic demonic heathens. It came into the nation Israel through their association with the Canaanites. The first mention of idolatry is in the account of Rachel stealing her father's teraphim (Genesis 31:19), which were the relics of the worship of other gods by Laban's forefathers. This was Israel's great national sin, which God dealt with through the Babylonian exile. That exile temporarily purified the Jews of all idolatrous tendencies. The first and second commandments are directed against idolatry of every form. The Mosaic Law mandated execution of the offender (Exodus 22:20). His nearest relatives were not only bound to denounce him and deliver him up to punishment (Deuteronomy 13:20-10), but they were to cast the first stone when, on the evidence of two witnesses at least, he was stoned (Deuteronomy 17:2-7). At the end of the Tribulation when Jesus returns there will be a national regeneration of Israel. At that time there will be the elimination of false prophets who led the nation in idolatry and enticed others into false worship. The false prophets families will according to the Mosaic Law be the first to carry out the punishment of their idolatrous family members. This was a capital crime in Israel (Deuteronomy13: 6-10).

Zechariah 13:2-4

²And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered; and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land ³And it shall come to pass that, when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of Jehovah; and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. ⁴And it shall come to pass in that day that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he prophesieth; neither shall they wear a hairy mantle to deceive: (ASV 1901).

In the New Testament the term idolatry is used to designate covetousness (Matthew 6: 24; Luke 16:13; Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5).

EZEKIEL PROTESTS AND GETS SOME RELIEF

Ezekiel 4:14-17

¹⁴Then said I, Ah Lord Jehovah! behold, my soul hath not been polluted; for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn of beasts; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. ¹⁵Then he said unto me, See, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread thereon. ¹⁶Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure, and in dismay: ¹⁷that they may want bread and water, and be dismayed one with another, and pine away in their iniquity (ASV, 1901).

Ezekiel clearly protests the idolatry associated with the fool preparation and nature to God. He approaches the subject from the offence of his conscience not his taste buds. He knew this food and preparation were outside the Law of God for the Jews. He simply says, "behold, my soul hath not been polluted; for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn of beasts; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth." God rescinds part of the commands knowing that Ezekiel is willing to do as God commands but is repulsed by violating the Mosaic Law especially as a priest. God graciously gives Ezekiel some relief and says to him "See, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread thereon." So he does not have to use the human dung for cooking his own food. God will not change what he has in store for the idolaters in Israel. They will measure out their food and water and wither away from starvation as a result of their sins.

Jerusalem was under siege for many long months as the food ran out and disease and starvation spread throughout the city. As the population of Jerusalem starved, women boiled their children for food and this was all because of their idolatry (Lamentation 4:10).

On July 10, 586 B.C. The Babylonian forces of king Nebuchadnezzar broke through the northern wall of Jerusalem and it was only a matter of time. Josephus records some of the gruesome details of the siege:

On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him. During this siege, Zedekiah and the remnants of his army broke out of Jerusalem and fled east toward Jericho, only to be captured and brought to Riblah where Nebuchadnezzar still maintained his headquarters. When he was come Nebuchadnezzar began to call him a wicked wretch and a covenant-breaker and one that had forgotten his former words, when he promised to keep the country for him. (Josephus. Antiquities 10:8:2).

Zedekiah was forced to watch his sons be executed before his eyes were gouged out. He was given bronze fetters and led 700 miles to Babylon, the land of idolatry where he would die in prison. The Jewish survivors were hauled across the Syrian Desert to Babylon, many of them perishing along the way. The Southern Kingdom of Judah had ceased to exist, the monarchy had ended and this marked the end of the First Temple Period (II Kings 25:7).

Jerusalem was burned and the walls of the city were torn down. All military, civil and religious leaders were either executed or carried away into captivity. Only the poorest of the peasants of Judah were allowed to remain in the land, which was by now a place of complete desolation.

NEXT MESSAGE: EZEKIEL SHAVES HIS HEAD

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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