

Ezekiel 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:

Analysis

Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem: God commands Ezekiel to perform the first of several prophetic sign-acts dramatizing Jerusalem's coming siege. The Hebrew *levenah* (לִבְנָה, "tile" or "brick") refers to a clay tablet commonly used in Mesopotamia for writing, maps, and construction plans. Ezekiel, trained as a priest (1:3), now becomes a prophet-dramatist, enacting God's judgment through visual theater.

The command to "pourtray" (chaqāq, חָקַק) means to inscribe, engrave, or draw—Ezekiel creates a detailed siege map on the clay surface. Specifying "the city, even Jerusalem" (ha'ir et-Yerushalayim, הָעִיר אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַיִם) emphasizes the shocking reality: God Himself is directing judgment against His holy city, the dwelling place of His name (1 Kings 8:29). This wasn't random catastrophe but divine discipline.

Theologically, this verse reveals God's sovereignty over history's course. The siege isn't Nebuchadnezzar's initiative alone but God's ordained judgment for covenant unfaithfulness. The prophetic drama also demonstrates God's patience—He warns before He strikes, giving opportunity for repentance. The exile audience watching Ezekiel's performance would understand: Jerusalem's fall was certain unless the people repented. This anticipates Christ, who wept over Jerusalem's coming destruction (Luke 19:41-44) because the city rejected her Messiah.

Historical Context

This prophecy dates to approximately 593 BC, during Ezekiel's exile in Babylon following Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation (597 BC). Jerusalem still stood, and many exiles believed their captivity would be brief—false prophets promised quick return (Jeremiah 28:2-4). Ezekiel's siege dramatization contradicted this false optimism, declaring Jerusalem faced total destruction.

Clay tablets were ubiquitous in Mesopotamian culture for administrative records, literary texts, and architectural plans. Archaeologists have recovered thousands of cuneiform tablets from ancient Babylon and Assyria. Ezekiel's use of this medium would have been culturally familiar to the exiled community while dramatically subverting expectations—instead of building plans for Babylon's glory, the tablet depicted Jerusalem's doom.

The city plan Ezekiel drew likely included walls, gates, and surrounding terrain—similar to ancient Near Eastern siege maps found in archaeological contexts. The exiles in Tel-Abib would gather to watch this street theater, understanding its ominous implications. Within a decade (586 BC), Ezekiel's prophetic drama became horrific reality when Babylonian armies breached Jerusalem's walls, destroyed the temple, and slaughtered or exiled the remaining population.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of visual, dramatic prophecy instruct us about communicating spiritual truth effectively?
2. What does Ezekiel's obedience to perform strange, countercultural acts teach about faithful prophetic ministry?

3. How should we respond when God's warnings contradict popular religious optimism?

Interlinear Text

וְאַתָּה הֵ	בֶן	אָדָם	קַח	לָךְ	לִבְנֶה הֵ	וְנָתַתָּה הֵ	אוֹתָהּ הֵ
H859	Thou also son	of man	take	H0	thee a tile	and lay	H853
	H1121	H120	H3947		H3843	H5414	
לִפְנֵי יְיָ	וְחִקּוֹתָ	עַל יְהֵ	עִיר	אֶת	יְרוּשָׁלַם:		
it before	thee and pourtray	H5921	upon it the city	H853	even Jerusalem		
H6440	H2710		H5892		H3389		

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