

Ezekiel 4:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink.

Analysis

Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. Water rationing compounds food scarcity—Ezekiel receives one-sixth of a hin (approximately 2/3 quart or 600ml) daily, roughly one-third of normal water intake. The "sixth part of a hin" (shishit ha-hin, שְׁשִׁית הָהִין) represents severe but not fatal dehydration, causing constant thirst and physical weakness. Like food, water is drunk "from time to time," emphasizing careful conservation of precious resources.

Water scarcity during siege was especially deadly in Jerusalem's climate, where summer temperatures regularly exceed 85°F (30°C). Ancient Jerusalem depended on springs like Gihon and stored rainwater in cisterns. During siege, these sources became inadequate for the swollen population (refugees fleeing Babylonian armies crowded into the city). Contamination from poor sanitation would further reduce safe water availability.

Symbolically, water represents spiritual life and God's provision (Psalm 42:1-2; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39). The rationing of water illustrates spiritual thirst resulting from covenant unfaithfulness. Just as physical thirst becomes unbearable during siege, souls apart from God experience deep spiritual longing that nothing else satisfies. Christ offers living water that eternally quenches spiritual thirst (John 4:14)—what Jerusalem lost through rebellion, believers gain through faith in Him who provides abundantly.

Historical Context

Ancient Jerusalem's water supply came primarily from the Gihon Spring accessed through tunnels like Hezekiah's (2 Kings 20:20), and rainwater collected in plastered cisterns throughout the city. During the 18-month Babylonian siege, these sources proved inadequate for the trapped population. Archaeological excavations have uncovered numerous cisterns in the City of David, many showing evidence of desperate attempts to deepen them during the siege.

One-sixth hin (approximately 600ml) daily was barely enough to prevent death from dehydration. Modern survival guidelines suggest 2-3 liters daily for minimal hydration in hot climates. Ezekiel's ration represented chronic dehydration causing weakness, impaired thinking, and vulnerability to disease. Combined with inadequate food, these conditions would have been debilitating.

The historical record confirms water scarcity's role in Jerusalem's fall. Lamentations describes the desperate search for water: "Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens...they dogged our steps...We must pay to drink our water; our wood comes only at a price" (Lamentations 4:19; 5:4). What Ezekiel dramatized prophetically, Jerusalem experienced literally within a decade.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does water scarcity during judgment symbolize the spiritual thirst of souls separated from God?
2. What does rationed water teach about taking God's daily provisions for granted?
3. How does Christ as the source of living water address our deepest spiritual thirst?

Interlinear Text

וְמִשְׁׁוֹךְ הַ	תְּשִׁתָּה:	שֶׁשׁ יְהִ	בַּפְּנֵי	עַת
also water	by measure	Thou shalt drink	the sixth part	of an hin

תַּעֲשֶׂה	תְּעַשֵּׂה	תַּשְׂתַּחַת
H5704	from time	Thou shalt drink

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