

Ezekiel 4:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith.

Analysis

Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith. In response to Ezekiel's protest (verse 14), God graciously modifies the command, substituting cow dung for human excrement. This divine concession demonstrates God's mercy even within judgment—He accommodates the prophet's scruples while maintaining the sign-act's essential message. Cow dung, though still repulsive to modern sensibilities, was ritually clean and commonly used as fuel in the ancient Near East where wood was scarce.

The Hebrew *hineh natatiti lekha* (הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לְךָ) "Lo, I have given thee" shows divine permission and provision. God doesn't require violation of conscience beyond what serves His prophetic purposes. The modification from human to cow dung maintains the sign's shocking nature (still abnormal for a priest) while avoiding absolute defilement. This balance illustrates that God's commands, though demanding, aren't arbitrary cruelty.

Theologically, this exchange reveals God's responsiveness to genuine, respectful objection. Ezekiel doesn't rebel against God's authority but appeals to his lifelong obedience and priestly consecration (verse 14). God honors this faithful protest by adjusting the method while preserving the message. This models appropriate interaction with divine commands—humble submission combined with honest expression of difficulty, trusting God's wisdom to determine what's truly necessary.

Historical Context

Dried animal dung (especially cattle and camel) served as primary fuel throughout the ancient Near East, particularly in regions where wood was scarce. Even today, dried dung cakes (called 'argol' or 'kiziak') are used for fuel in many traditional societies. The dung burns slowly, producing steady heat suitable for baking flatbreads. While unpleasant-smelling, it was ritually clean according to Levitical law and widely accepted in Israelite culture.

God's concession to Ezekiel demonstrates that the sign-act's power didn't depend on absolute maximum defilement but on conveying the message of exile's degradation. Using cow dung still communicated abnormality (a priest reduced to common fuel) and deprivation (inability to obtain better fuel) while avoiding ceremonial uncleanness that would have prevented Ezekiel's continued prophetic ministry.

This modification also shows God's pastoral care for His servants. Ezekiel would perform this sign-act for over a year—the sustained nature required it to be bearable. An unmodified command might have crushed the prophet's spirit or invalidated his ministry among people who would have rejected a defiled priest. God's wisdom adjusted means while preserving ends, demonstrating His perfect balance of justice and mercy.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does God's modification of His command teach about the relationship between divine sovereignty and human conscience?
2. How does this passage model appropriate, faith-filled objection to difficult divine commands?

3. In what ways does God's accommodation of Ezekiel's scruples reveal His pastoral care for His servants?

Interlinear Text

בָּקָר צְפֻעַ אַתְּ לְבָנָת
Then he said unto me Lo I have given dung thee cow's
H559 H413 H7200 H5414 H0 H853 H6832 H1241

עֲלֵיכֶם לְחַמֵּב אַתְּ כָּלְלָת
dung for man's and thou shalt prepare thy bread
H8478 H1561 H120 H6213 H853 H3899 H5921

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