

Ezekiel 4:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Moreover 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 care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment:

Analysis

Moreover 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 care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment: God now explicitly interprets the sign-act's meaning for Jerusalem. "Break the staff of bread" (shover matteh-lechem, שֹׁבֵר מַטֵּה לֶחֶם) is a powerful metaphor—bread as a "staff" or support that sustains life (Leviticus 26:26; Psalm 105:16). Breaking this staff means removing the foundational provision that supports existence. The passive population will "eat bread by weight" (be-mishqal, בְּמִשְׁקָל), exactly as Ezekiel has been doing (verse 10).

"With care" (uvid'agah, וּבִדְאָגָה) means anxiety, worry, or distress—every morsel consumed with agonizing awareness of scarcity and uncertainty about tomorrow's provision. "Drink water by measure" (be-messurah, בְּמִסוּרָה) parallels the bread rationing. "With astonishment" (uveshimamon, וּבִשְׁמָמון) conveys horror, desolation, or stupefaction—people will be stunned by the unprecedented suffering and desperate conditions.

This verse fulfills covenant curses promised in Leviticus 26:26 and Deuteronomy 28:48-57 for covenant violation. God's blessings included abundant provision; His curses included famine and scarcity. The fulfillment demonstrates God's faithfulness to His word—both promises and threats. Spiritually, this reminds us

that humans cannot live by bread alone but by every word from God's mouth (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). When people reject God's word, even physical bread becomes uncertain.

Historical Context

The siege of Jerusalem (589-586 BC) produced exactly these conditions. Jeremiah records: "The famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land" (Jeremiah 52:6). Lamentations graphically describes the horror: "Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets; those who were brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps...The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them" (Lamentations 4:5, 4).

Archaeological evidence from the destruction layer in Jerusalem reveals grinding stones, cooking pots, and food storage jars, many broken or burnt. The sudden, violent end to normal life is evident in these artifacts. Human remains from this period show signs of malnutrition and disease consistent with prolonged famine.

The measured rations and anxious eating Ezekiel prophesied became daily reality for 18 months. Each day brought new desperation as food reserves dwindled. The astonishment came from watching an apparently unassailable city—protected by walls, David's legacy, and God's temple—reduced to starvation and eventual destruction. What seemed impossible happened because God's word always proves true, whether blessing or curse.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the 'breaking of the staff of bread' illustrate the removal of basic provisions we take for granted?
2. What does eating 'with care' and 'with astonishment' teach about the psychological trauma of judgment and scarcity?
3. In what ways does this passage challenge us to depend on God's word even more than daily bread?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֶל־י	בֶּן־	אָדָם	הִנֵּנִי	שֶׁבֶר
Moreover he said	H413	unto me Son	of man	H2005	behold I will break
H559		H1121	H120		H7665
מַטֵּה	לֶחֶם	בֵּיר וּשְׁלָם	וְאָכְלוּ	לֶחֶם	בְּמִשְׁקָל
the staff	bread	in Jerusalem	and they shall eat	bread	by weight
H4294	H3899	H3389	H398	H3899	H4948
וּבְדַאגָּה	וּמַיִם	בְּמִשׁוֹרֶה	וּבְשִׂמְמָה	וְשָׁתוּ:	
and with care	water	by measure	and with astonishment	and they shall drink	
H1674	H4325	H4884	H8078	H8354	

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 5:16 (Parallel theme): When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread:

Isaiah 3:1 (References Jerusalem): For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water,

Leviticus 26:26 (Parallel theme): And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied.

Ezekiel 14:13 (Parallel theme): Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it:

Psalms 105:16 (Parallel theme): Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread.

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