

Ezekiel 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.

Analysis

Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. The iron pan (machavat barzel, מַחְבַּת בַּרְזֶל)—likely a flat griddle used for baking—becomes a prophetic symbol of the impenetrable barrier between God and Jerusalem. The "wall of iron" (qir barzel, קִיר בַּרְזֶל) represents God's immovable decree of judgment and the severed communion between Yahweh and His people due to persistent sin.

The command "set thy face against it" (hakhinotah panekha, הַכְּינֹתָה פָּנֶיךָ) uses covenant lawsuit language—to set one's face against someone means hostile opposition (Leviticus 17:10; 20:3-6). Shockingly, God positions Himself as Jerusalem's enemy. Ezekiel the priest, who should mediate between God and people, instead represents God's antagonism toward the rebellious city. This role reversal dramatizes Israel's broken covenant relationship.

The designation "This shall be a sign to the house of Israel" (ot hi le-beit Yisrael, אוֹת הִיא לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל) establishes the prophetic drama's didactic purpose. Like the Exodus signs that manifested God's power and will, this sign declares God's judgment. The iron barrier anticipates the separation Christ experienced on the cross when God turned His face from Him who bore our sins (Matthew 27:46),

demonstrating that sin creates an unbridgeable chasm between holy God and guilty humanity—bridgeable only through substitutionary atonement.

Historical Context

In ancient Israel, prophets regularly used symbolic actions (*ma'aseh mofet*) to communicate God's message visually. Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years (Isaiah 20:2-3), Jeremiah wore a yoke (Jeremiah 27-28), and Hosea married an unfaithful wife (Hosea 1-3). These weren't mere illustrations but enacted prophecies that participated in bringing about the reality they depicted.

The iron pan's symbolic use would resonate powerfully with the exiles. In temple worship, griddles were used for grain offerings (Leviticus 2:5), sacred implements mediating between God and His people. By placing this cultic object as a barrier rather than a conduit, Ezekiel demonstrated that Israel's worship had become ineffective—their sacrifices couldn't penetrate the iron wall their sins had erected.

By 593 BC, when Ezekiel performed this sign-act, Jerusalem had approximately seven years before Babylon's final assault. The exiles in Babylon foolishly believed the holy city's sanctity guaranteed protection. Ezekiel's iron wall shattered this presumption: God's presence doesn't automatically protect; covenant faithfulness is required. The temple's destruction in 586 BC vindicated Ezekiel's warning—sacred space without holy living invites judgment, not blessing.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does sin create an iron barrier between us and God that human effort cannot remove?
2. What does Ezekiel representing God's hostility toward Jerusalem teach about God's response to persistent rebellion?
3. In what ways might we presume on God's presence or protection while living in disobedience?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵת הַ	קַח	לְךָ	מִחֹבֶת לְ	בַרְזֵל	וְנָתַתָּה	אוֹתָהּ
H859	Moreover take	H0	pan	of iron	and set	H853
	H3947		H4227	H1270	H5414	
קִיר	בַּרְזֵל	וּבֵין	יְדֵי	הָעִיר	וְהִכְיִנְתָּהּ	אֵת
it for a wall	of iron	H996	H996	between thee and the city	and set	H853
H7023	H1270			H5892	H3559	
פָּנֶי	יְהוָה	וְהָיְתָה	בְּמָצוֹר			
thy face	H413	H1961	against it and it shall be besieged			
H6440			H4692			
וְצָרְתָּ	עַל יְהוָה	אֹת	הָיָא	לְבֵית		
and thou shalt lay siege	H5921	against it	This shall be a sign	H1931	to the house	
H6696			H226		H1004	
יִשְׂרָאֵל:						
of Israel						
H3478						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 20:3 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;

Isaiah 8:18 (References Israel): Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.

Ezekiel 12:6 (References Israel): In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 12:11 (Parallel theme): Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity.

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