

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, מְחַבֵּת בָּרֶזֶל)—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, קֵיר בָּרֶזֶל) 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, הַקְרִין־תְּהִנֵּתָה 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, אֹותָהּ 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

וְאַפְתָּה	בְּגַח	לְבָנָת	לְבָנָת	וְנִתְחַטֵּת	בְּרִזְעָן	לְמִקְבֵּת	לְמִקְבֵּת	וְאַזְמַתָּה
H859	Moreover	take	H0	pan	of iron	and	set	H853
	H3947		H4227	H1270	H5414			
אַת	תִּקְרִינְתָּה	בְּעֵיר	בְּיַד	בְּיַד	בְּיַד	בְּמִצּוֹר		
it for a wall	and set	between thee and the city	between	thee and the city	H5892			H3559
H7023	H1270	H996	H996					
thy face	H413	H1961	against it and it shall be besieged	H4692				
H6440								
לְבָנָת	הַיָּא	אֲזַרְעָת	עַל יָד	אֲזַרְעָת	אֲזַרְעָת	בְּמִצּוֹר		
and thou shalt lay siege	H1931	against it This shall be a sign	H226					
H6696								
וְשִׁבְעָל:								
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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