EZEKIEL 4

The Siege Acted Out: Bearing the Iniquity

> *“When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year.”*
> EZEKIEL 4:6

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Ezekiel is a priest living among the exiles by the river Chebar in Babylon.

2. Chapters 4–5 are a set of sign-acts — prophecy you could watch.

Jerusalem on a Brick

A toy siege, an iron wall, and a prophet's set face

EZEKIEL 4:2

"Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik pictures it like a child with toy soldiers — something a crowd would stop and watch. Ezekiel's mouth was bound (3:26), so God gave him signs instead of speeches.

WHAT IT MEANS

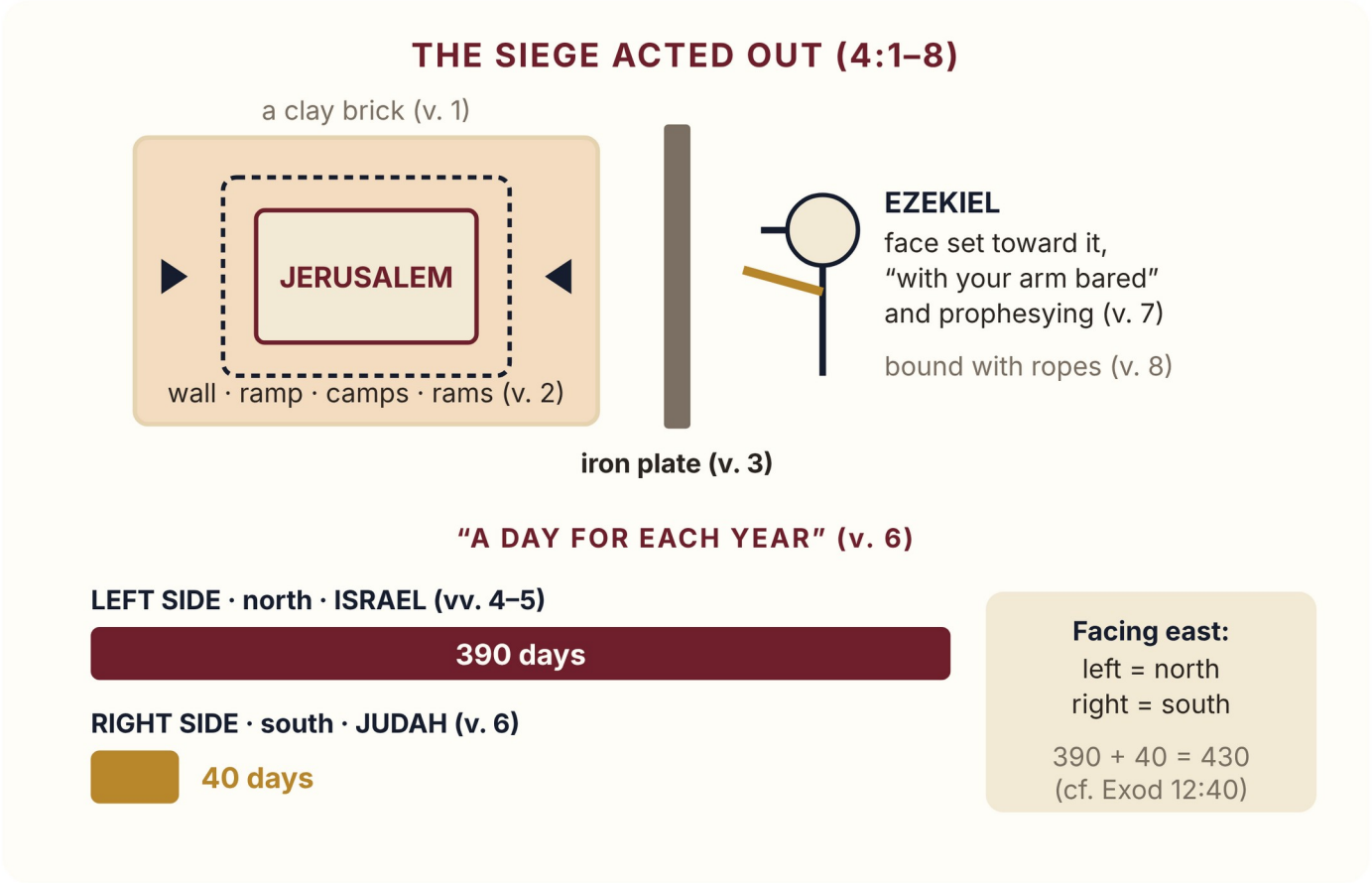
The exiles were hoping Jerusalem would rescue them. God had Ezekiel draw the city on a brick and lay siege to it — wall, ramp, camps and "battering rams against it all around" (v. 2).

Sign (אוֹת)

OTH · "SIGN, SIGNAL, TOKEN"

Oth means a sign, a signal or a token — something you can see that points beyond itself. Verse 3 ends, "This is a sign to the house of Israel."

The Siege Sign-Acts



Ezekiel besieges a brick-model Jerusalem behind an iron plate, then lies on his left side for Israel and his right for Judah (4:1–8).

390 Days and 40 Days

The prophet bears the iniquity — a day for each year

EZEKIEL 4:5

"For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik does not force a single answer on the numbers. He says the best explanation 'was stated by Wiersbe,' who adds up the reigns of Judah's kings from Rehoboam to Zedekiah and arrives 'very close' to 390.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ezekiel lies on his left side for Israel, "three hundred and ninety days" (v. 5), then on his right for Judah, "forty days, a day for each year" (v. 6). Facing east, left is north (Israel) and right is south (Judah).

Iniquity (עָוֹן)
AVON · "GUILT, INIQUITY"

Avon means guilt or iniquity — both the wrong done and the punishment it brings. It repeats through the chapter (vv. 4, 5, 6, 17).

Siege Bread

Six grains in one pot, rations by weight, baked over dung

EZEKIEL 4:9

"But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik, quoting Taylor, figures the twenty shekels at 'almost exactly 8 ounces of bread per day' and the water at 'a fraction over a pint.' Poole, in Guzik: 'Scarce enough to keep the man alive.'

WHAT IT MEANS

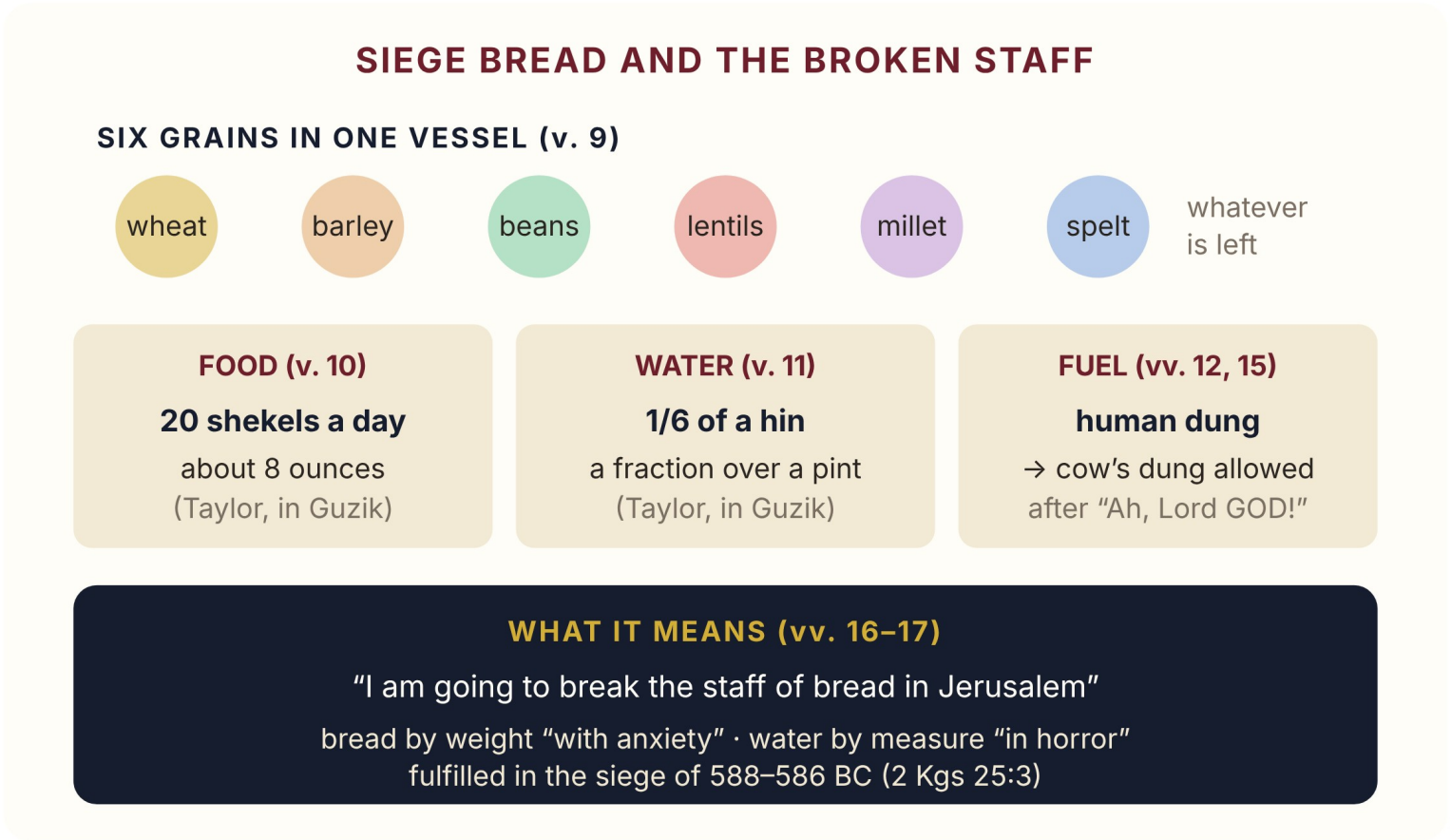
A mix of six grains and legumes in one pot is what people eat when the storehouse is almost empty — you throw together whatever is left (v. 9).

Dung (גֵּלֶל)

GELEL · "DUNG, REFUSE"

Gelel means dung or refuse. It was fuel, not an ingredient: the bread was to be baked "over human dung" (v. 12), in a land where wood would be gone.

Siege Bread and the Broken Staff



Ezekiel's daily ration pictured the hunger of the coming siege — the staff of bread broken in Jerusalem (4:9–17).

“Ah, Lord GOD!”

An honest objection — and a God who listens

EZEKIEL 4:14

But I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth.”

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that Ezekiel never protested lying on his side for over a year — but this was too much; he ‘had never so offensively broken Jewish dietary laws.’

WHAT IT MEANS

Ezekiel obeyed the hard things without a word, but here he cries out: “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never been defiled” (v. 14). He tells God plainly what troubles him — and God listens.

Unclean (טָמֵא)
TAME · “DEFILED, IMPURE”

Tame means ceremonially defiled or impure. God explains the sign: “Thus will the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will banish them” (v. 13).

The Staff of Bread Broken

What the sign means: hunger, horror and wasting away

EZEKIEL 4:16

Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror,

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik explains that 'staff of bread' means the bread a person leans on to live (Lev 26:26). When it breaks, people weigh every crumb with anxiety and stare at one another in horror.

WHAT IT MEANS

God explains the drama: "I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem" (v. 16). The people leaned on their city, their temple and their stockpile, and every one of those failed.

Staff (מַטֶּה)

MATTEH · "STAFF, ROD"

Matteh is a staff or rod — something you lean on. "The staff of bread" (v. 16; compare Lev 26:26) is the bread a man leans on to stay alive.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Preaching with props.

With his mouth bound, Ezekiel acted out the siege on a brick — a street drama a crowd would stop to watch (4:1–3).

2

An iron wall.

The iron plate showed God would not step in to save the city this time (4:3).

3

Iniquity has weight.

Avon is both the wrong and its punishment; nasa means to lift and carry it (4:4).

4

Counted days.

390 days and 40 days, “a day for each year” — God measured the judgment, and not one day more (4:5–6).

More to carry

5

Teachers differ on 390.

Wiersbe adds up Judah's kings; Feinberg reads years of punishment; others hear Egypt's 430 years (4:5).

6

Enough to stay alive.

About eight ounces of bread and a pint of water a day — scarce enough to keep a man alive (4:10–11).

7

God hears objections.

God allowed Ezekiel to lessen the offense, but not take it away (4:14–15).

8

The staff that breaks.

Matteh is a staff to lean on; the bread they leaned on would break in the siege (4:16).

Talk it through

1. The exiles were counting on Jerusalem to stand. What ‘Jerusalem’ have you counted on that God may need to take away?

2. Ezekiel bore the iniquity of Israel and Judah on his side. How does that picture help you see what Jesus carried for you?

3. God measured the days — 390 and 40, no more. How does it help a man doing time, or fighting an addiction, to know God counts the days?

4. Ezekiel said “Ah, Lord GOD!” and God listened. What honest objection do you need to bring to God instead of hiding?

5. What “staff of bread” have you leaned on that broke under you? What are you leaning on now?

CLOSING

God measures the days, keeps His word in judgment and in mercy, and listens to a troubled servant. The staff of bread in Jerusalem broke — but the iniquity Ezekiel pictured on his side was finally laid on God's Son. Lean on Him; He never breaks.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.