

## Chapter 4

**Date:** The revelation contained herein was given on  
**Saturday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 593 BC** (The 12<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, 3,169)  
The 390 days Ezekiel laid on  
his left side ended no earlier than  
**July 24<sup>th</sup>, 592 BC** (The 15<sup>th</sup> of Ab, 3,169).  
While the additional 40 days of lying on  
his right side ended no earlier than  
**September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 592 BC** (The 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul, 3,169).  
Note that his next revelation was received on  
**August 13<sup>th</sup>, 592 BC** (The 5<sup>th</sup> of Elul, 3,169).

**Historical Setting:** The prophet Ezekiel is living among his fellow Jewish captives in the exile community of Tel-abib just outside the capital city of Babylonia, Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar reigns during the entire time period during this chapter. King Zedekiah rules Jerusalem as a “Puppet” King under King Nebuchadnezzar’s control. King Zedekiah’s arrogance lead him to rebel against the King of Babylonia. King Zedekiah and the most part of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were stiff-necked, prideful, and outright wicked.

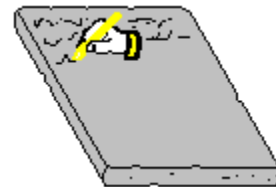
**Preview:** The Lord instructs Ezekiel to act out a very symbolic scene that prophesied of Babylonia’s final siege on Jerusalem. In this scene, the Lord conveys some of the conditions that would be associated with the siege.



**Verse 1:** “**Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:**”

In typical form to the rest of Ezekiel’s writings, the Lord refers to Ezekiel as “*son of man*”, again making reference to the fact that he was indeed the son of a mortal man.

The Lord instructs Ezekiel to perform a very literal act with deep symbolic meaning. This verse instructs Ezekiel to take a tile and lay it in front of him. Ezekiel was then to draw a picture or layout of the city of Jerusalem on the tile. Upon first reading this

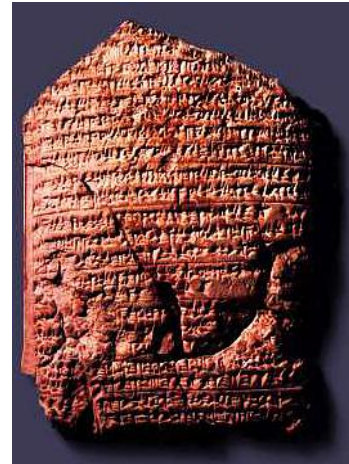


verse, one might envision Ezekiel taking a roof shingle or a brick because of the Lord's instruction to take a tile; however, the verse is most likely referring to a writing tile.

In ancient times, the Israelites recorded their writings on large clay tablets. They would make large clay plates, and before they were thoroughly dry they would write upon the plates surface using a stylus. They would then allow the plates to dry resulting in a permanent record.

One can conclude there are several problems with the clay tablets. First, they don't allow for future editing. One was required to write upon the tile within a specified time or the tile would be dry. They were also inconvenient. If one wished to write, it required that a tile should be made. Another problem with the tiles is the fact that they were cumbersome and difficult to archive. It isn't any wonder the Israelites, as well as the Babylonians, choose to look for other writing means. They were easily sold on using methods introduced by other societies. The Israelites have been known to record on metal plates, wooden plates, and finally scrolls.

*"The clay tablets used by Israelite scribes bore resemblance to large bricks", or tiles ". The bricks in use among the Jews were much larger than with us, being usually twelve to thirteen inches square and three and one-half inches thick; they thus possess more of the character of tiles as spoken of in Ezekiel chapter four, verse one. The Israelites, in common with the captives, were employed by the Egyptian monarchs in making bricks and in building"* (Smith's Bible Dictionary, by William Smith, L.L.D., pages 97-98).



**Clay Writing Tablet  
With Cuneiform Script  
typical of that used by  
the Babylonians**

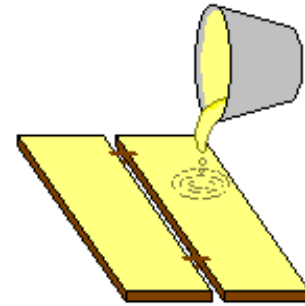
### **An Assyrian Brick from Nimroud or Nimrod**



**Inscribed with Shalmaneser's Name & Title**

For many years, it was thought the ancient Babylonians only used soft clay tablets, to record their cuneiform text with a stylus, which were later dried and hardened. This would indeed appear as a tile or a thin brick. In 1948, a man by the name of M. San Nicolo was researching two Babylonian texts, when he found that the ancient Babylonian scribes were filling wooden tablets with wax for the purpose of writing. Just five years later, archaeologist Max Mallowan discovered a set of sixteen hinged wax writing boards in Assyria.

There might be some debate as to whether or not the tile that the Lord commanded Ezekiel to write upon was a clay tile or a wooden tablet filled with wax. Whether it was one or the other probably was not significant; however, if Ezekiel wrote on a clay tablet (which is most probable) it could have had some symbolic meaning to the exiles.



The children of Israel taught their children about the captivity in Egypt that they were subjected to hundreds of years prior to this time. It was probably a vivid memory in every Israelites' mind that they were brick makers and tile setters in Egyptian slave camps. This might give some explanation as to the significance of Ezekiel's symbolic act. Ezekiel was to convey to a group of exiled Jews that the great city of Jerusalem and the chosen people of the Lord would again be oppressed and he conveyed the idea on a brick or tile, a symbol of their past oppression.

There are several other symbolic interpretations that can be derived from this verse. If Ezekiel drew on a clay tablet, it could very well convey the idea that God's commands cannot be changed or altered. The Lord himself has said, "*What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants, it is the same*" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:38). It could also reference the fact that Jerusalem is built upon a rock. Similarly, Ezekiel was commanded to lay the tablet before him, which could symbolize the fact that God was revealing or making known the mysteries of heaven.

Regardless of the device Ezekiel used, The Lord told Ezekiel to engrave, write, draw or cut a representation of the city of Jerusalem for the exiles to see. Though this act is rich in symbolism, the act itself was very literal. The Lord was conveying his message through powerful symbols.

**Verse 2:** “**And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about.**”

Understanding this verse, as well as the rest of chapter four in the Book of Ezekiel, is greatly enhanced by understanding the history of Jerusalem during the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian Empire (See Appendix b - Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylonia). Without this information the reader is left to ask, what siege? Who would attack Jerusalem? And why? By understanding the history, one learns that the Jews in Jerusalem were far from following the counsels of God. They were currently living under the rule of Babylon with a puppet king, King Zedekiah, on the Jewish throne paying tribute to King Nebuchadnezzar. History states that King Zedekiah became proud and stopped paying his tribute. This represented an act of open rebellion against King Nebuchadnezzar, who as the prophecy states comes against Jerusalem in a great siege. It is this siege in which verse two refers.

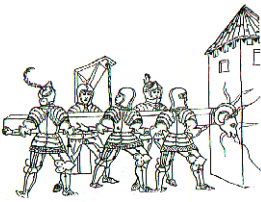
The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote, “*This siege they endured for eighteen months, until they were destroyed by famine, and by the darts which the enemy threw at them from the towers. Now the city was taken on the ninth day of the fourth month, in the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah*” (Josephus, *The Complete Works, Antiquities of the Jews*, by Flavius Josephus, Page 219-220). The great city of Jerusalem was under siege for 540 days or 18 months. Using the Jewish calendar, the siege would have started at the end of December 588 BC and ended in the end of June 586 BC.

Given this historical insight, let us refer back to verse two. The Lord told Ezekiel to “**lay siege against**” the tile upon which he had drawn the city of Jerusalem. Obviously, Ezekiel was not going to literally lay siege to his sketch or drawing of Jerusalem, but rather draw upon the tile a plan of attack, or siege against the city which eventually came from Babylonia. In this prophetic siege, Jerusalem was to have forts and mounds built against it. One can imagine the prophet drawing these upon his tile. The besiegers were foretold to set up camp against Jerusalem, and use battering rams against the great city. Likewise, one could easily see Ezekiel drawing camps of soldiers with the mounds and forts between them and Jerusalem as their protection.

In this verse, the Lord, through Ezekiel his Prophet, was issuing a divine warning of Jerusalem’s not so distant future. In fulfillment of this prophesy the historian Flavius Josephus, like many other historians and scribes, records Jerusalem’s prophesied siege as follows, “*Now the king of Babylon was very intent and earnest upon the siege of Jerusalem; and he erected towers upon great banks of earth, and from them repelled those that stood on the walls: he also made a great number of such banks round about the whole city, the height of which*

was equal to those walls” (Josephus, *The Complete Works, Antiquities of the Jews*, by Flavius Josephus, Page 219).

The Lord was pretty specific in his description of Jerusalem’s eventual siege by Babylonia. Through Ezekiel, the Lord told of forts being erected about Jerusalem, as well as mounds and camps. In the Book of Second Kings, we read of the biblical accounting of the siege after it happened, “*And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it: and they built forts against it round about*” (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 25:1). Through history it is plain to see the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophesy.

Ezekiel also prophesied of battering rams being used against the great city of Jerusalem. We know through history that battering rams were indeed used in the siege of Jerusalem. Smith’s Bible Dictionary defines a battering ram as, “*a large beam with a head of iron which sometimes made to resemble the head of a ram. It was suspended by ropes to a beam supported*  *by posts, and balanced so as to swing forward, and was impelled the wall. In attacking the city, the first step appears form an inclined plane or* *backward and by men against walls of a fort or to have been to bank of earth.* Ezekiel 4:2, ‘*cast a mount against it,*’ by the besiegers could bring their battering rams and other engines to the foot of the walls. ‘*The battering-rams,*’ says Mr. Layard, ‘*were of several kinds. Some were joined to movable towers which held warriors and armed men. The whole then formed one great temporary building, the top of which is represented in sculptures as on one level with the walls, and even turrets, of the besieged city. In some bas-reliefs the battering-ram is without wheels: it was then perhaps constructed upon the spot and was not intended to be moved*’” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary, by William Smith, L.L.D., page 78).

Later in the Book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel further prophesied about the siege of Jerusalem and said, “*At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort*” (Ezekiel 21:22). Ezekiel uttered a great voice of warning of the events that were going to take place in Jerusalem. His details were precise and his warning was clear.

Ezekiel was not the only voice of warning that the Lord sent to his people prior to this great siege. Back in Jerusalem, a fellow prophet of the Lord, Nephi, recorded the following in about 600 BC, “*For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in*

*all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1<sup>st</sup> Nephi 1:4). The Lord taught Lehi “concerning Jerusalem--that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon” (1<sup>st</sup> Nephi 1:13). And after the Lord had taught Lehi much regarding the will of the Lord, Lehi “went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard” (1<sup>st</sup> Nephi 1:18).*

Who were the “many prophets, prophesying unto the people” that Nephi spoke of? Well, there were indeed many. At this point we will just quote a few of them. Jeremiah, who lived in the early 600’s BC into Ezekiel’s era, prophesied much of Jerusalem destruction. It was he who said, “*For thus hath the LORD of hosts said, ... cast a mount against Jerusalem...*” (Jeremiah 6:6). Nehemiah, who prophesied around 642 BC, said, “*...Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire...*” (Nehemiah 2:17). Micah, another prophet of ancient Israel who prophesied around 722 BC, said, “*Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest*” (Micah 3:12). Habakkuk, who prophesied around 598 BC, said, “*The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand*” (Habakkuk 1:1,6-9). In about 640 BC, the prophet Zephaniah prophesied saying, “*And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof*” (Zephaniah 1:12-13). Finally, the great prophet Isaiah, who prophesied over 150 years before the great siege of Jerusalem, said, “*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*” (Isaiah 3:1).

It is inspiring to read the tremendous voices of warning that were given to the saints of Jerusalem prior to the siege of 588 BC. It

makes me ponder the questions, "Are we being warned of similar things about our future?" and "Are we responding as Lehi did to the counsel of God, or are we responding as the Jews of his time with disbelief or worse yet are we responding by mocking, rebelling, and out right apostatizing from the truth?"

**Verse 3:** **"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."**

Continuing with His instructions, the Lord continues to direct Ezekiel in his role of acting out the symbolic performance that would act as a voice of warning to the Hebrews. The Lord tells the young prophet to take an iron pan and place it between himself and the city of Jerusalem that he had portrayed on the tile. Iron typically symbolizes harness, durability, strength, firmness, and inflexibility. *"The 'iron pan' represented the wall that the Chaldeans erected around Jerusalem during their siege. It prevented escape and allowed no entry of supplies"*



*(Old Testament Student Manual, Religion 302, page 268).*

There are some interesting contrasts in symbols between the first three verses of this chapter. The clay tile spoken of in verse one could represent the fact that Jerusalem was built upon a rock. Rocks and stone symbolize stability, durability, reliability, immortality, indestructibility, and strength. The Hebrew temple (Solomon's Temple) was built upon a stone foundation and was thought to be the center of the world. The Hebrews felt their city was not only indestructible, but that the God of Israel would protect them. His temple was in their city, and they could not believe that the Lord would allow His temple to be destroyed. They had misunderstood this simple principle, *"I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise"* (Doctrine and Covenants 82:10). The Israelites had defiled the temple and broken the Lord's laws, but somehow felt that they held title to the Lord's promises. In opposition to this, the Lord places an iron pan against Jerusalem. Iron represents a stronger material than stone. Despite the strength of Jerusalem, the Lord was sending the message that he was going to send an even stronger force against the Hebrews. They would soon realize that without the Lord, they were nothing.

Going further into verse three, the Lord tells Ezekiel to set his face against Jerusalem. There are many passages in the scriptures where the Lord uses the symbolic phrase of *"setting thine face against"*

something. The face symbolizes one's person, countenance, or the state of one's being. The Lord appears to be assigning the prophet Ezekiel the role of representing the Babylonians in this symbolic skit. Setting his face against Jerusalem would indicate that the Babylonians would come against Jerusalem in opposition.

*“According to biblical record, the Babylonian armies smashed Jerusalem’s defenses (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 25:10), destroyed the Temple and palace (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 29:9, 13-17; Jeremiah 52:13, 17-23), and devastated the country (Jeremiah 32:43). Many of the leaders and priests were killed (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 25:18-21).*

*Though these biblical statements have been denied by skeptical scholars such as Torrey, the severity of the devastation wrought by the Babylonians has been amply confirmed by archaeology. Weinberg concludes: ‘A rapid review of the archaeological evidence from Judah of the sixth century B.C.E. thus gives a picture wholly in keeping with the literary evidence: thorough destruction of all fortified towns and cities by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces in 586, a great decrease in population due to slaughter, deportation, pestilence, flight and the resultant complete collapse of the economy, which continued, but at a very low ebb, through the efforts of those who remained behind and those who slowly drifted back, so rudimentary must this existence have been that it has proved extremely difficult to pick up its traces in material remains.*

*Evidences of the Babylonian attacks have been uncovered at Arad, Beth-Shemesh, Beth-Zur, Eglon, En Gedi, Gibeah, Rmat Rahel, and Tell Beit Mirsim. Recently archaeologists have recovered for the first time dramatic evidence of the final attack on Jerusalem, including Scythian-type arrowheads.’*

*The archaeological picture of the period after the destruction of Jerusalem has yet to be fully clarified by excavations. The Israeli surveys of Judah in 1967-68 noted hundreds of new sites, which date from this era. According to Weinberg: ‘Most of these are villages or small towns, largely nameless and therefore not the kind of site that has hitherto attracted the archaeologists interested in biblical places. Yet a number of these have yielded material from the sixth century, and it now seems clear that it was in such places that most of the remaining inhabitants of Judah lived after the most important centers were destroyed by the Babylonians. During this time some limited forms of worship were continued in the ruined area of the Temple (Jeremiah 41:5). The Scriptures themselves pass over developments in Palestine and stress the contribution of the returning exiles from Babylonia. Some have questioned this emphasis. Noth comments that though ‘very important developments in life and thought took place among those deported to Babylon...nevertheless even the Babylonian group*



*represented a mere outpost, whereas Palestine was and remained the central arena of Israel's history.'*

*In light of the fact that the intellectual and spiritual leaders were the ones who were deported, the Scriptures reflect the historical situation. As Gowan comments, 'There does not exist sufficient evidence or probability of an active, creative group in the land during the exile, although the continuance of some form of Yahwism is not to be doubted'' (The Archaeological Background of Ezra, Edwin M. Yamauchi, pages 2-3).*

**Verse 4-5:** **"Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel."**

These two verses (verses four and five) probably represent one of the most puzzling passages in scripture. Ezekiel is told to lie on his left side. We need to keep in mind that Ezekiel represents the Babylonians in this act. The Babylonians were to lie against Jerusalem. The word lie, if not used in its literal form, usually implies one of the following ideas; death (IE lie down to eternal rest), sexual relations (IE the Jacob did lie down with the daughter of Moab), or a state of being (IE lie in wait, lie in waste, lie in sorrow...). The term lie can also represent siege, opposition, and conflict.

Aside from just lying on his side, Ezekiel was directed quite specifically to lie on his left side. The left has significant symbolic meaning. The left side is usually the sinister and dark side of things. It represents the evil. Likewise it represents wickedness and the side of Satan. In the judgement, the sheep shall be on the right side of Christ, while the goats will be on his left side. During the crucifixion it is said that the good thief was on Christ's right side while the bad thief was on Christ's left side. The left also symbolizes violence, destruction, and even self-destruction.

The Lord's choice of symbolism could easily be interpreted that the Babylonians would lay siege either in wickedness, for wickedness, or both. The Lord has definitely defined the fact the Israel was wicked, and this verse defines the symbolism by saying that Ezekiel was to lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon his left side. The house of Israel spoken of in this verse represents the entire twelve tribes of Israel. It is all of the Lord's people. This is the beginning of the speculation regarding these verses. The ten tribes were no longer part of Judah, and though the Kingdom of Judah was often referred to as the Israelites,

verse six is quite clear that it is not the Kingdom of Judah to which the Lord is referring.

It is very interesting that Ezekiel was told that he was to “bear their iniquity”. You see, Ezekiel was a Levite, and hundreds of years before even Ezekiel, the Lord outlined to the children of Israel the duties of the Levites included “bearing the iniquity” of the children of Israel. “But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance” (Numbers 18:23).

At this point the verse becomes significantly unclear as to its meaning. The Lord instructs Ezekiel that he is to lie on his left side for the house of Israel for "390" days. It should be noted that there is no other reference to the number three hundred and ninety anywhere else in the standard works other than in this chapter. Neither is there any symbolic meaning for the number “390” in traditional commentaries and texts. The number could be broken down into base numbers, which have symbolic meanings; however, the relationship between these numbers is unsure. The most probable base numbers for the number “390” are 3 x 10 x 13. The base numbers of "390" could be defined symbolically as follows;

<b>Three</b>	The number three usually symbolizes the godhead, and consequently symbolized perfection. The number three and its relationship to the term perfection is further emphasized with other relationships that have to do with the number three. For example, heaven-earth-water, body-soul-spirit, birth-life-death, beginning-middle-end, and past-present-future. The number three is also the base number for three other numbers that have similar symbolic meanings, $3 \times 4 = 12$ and $3 + 4 = 7$ .
<b>Ten</b>	The number ten is the number of the cosmos. It is considered the number of perfection and completeness. It is also the foundation for modern counting. Examples of the number ten in symbolism are the 10 commandments, the 10 virgins and tithing which is $1/10^{\text{th}}$ .
<b>Thirteen</b>	The number thirteen is considered the unlucky number. It is associated with evil and often related to witchcraft. Judas was the thirteenth apostle; therefore it is also associated with betrayal. It is also the number used in divination, the power of Satan, and false gods.

The Lord does define for us that the number of days which Ezekiel was to bear Israel's sins was equivalent to actual years. The

days that Ezekiel was to lie on his side actually represented 390 years. The Lord says that the "390" years was the years of their iniquity, but scholars have given much debate as to when this time period occurred. Some theorize that the "390" represents the years that Israel was under captivity in Egypt. Others theorize it is the number of years that Israel was involved in Idol worship. Some have even suggested that the "390" years were those of Assyrian captivity; however, the captivity lasted but 95 to 109 years. There is no doubt that Israel was grossly wicked, the question here is what time period is the Lord referring to, and does it have other symbolic meanings. The answer is still unclear.

One final comment on these verses, the Lord commands Ezekiel to lie on his left side for well over a year. There are many that theorize he was to lie on his left side only during the day while he was visible to the exiles. The argument is that he would have been required to use the restroom and perform other necessary acts. Others also argue that he was a captive and was most probably required to work. The scripture passage is not clear on this point. We are left to assume that he was to lie for the full "390" days, both day and night. Whatever the case may be, it is a surety that the Lord accomplished His will, and the way was made possible for Ezekiel to accomplish his task.

**Verse 6:** **"And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year."**

Parallel with verses four and five, in verse six the Lord instructs Ezekiel that after he has spent over a year lying on his left side, symbolically bearing the sins of Israel, he was then to turn over to his right side and perform the very same act for "40" days for the sins of the house of Judah.

The right has significant symbolic meaning. It is usually associated with the sun. It is the side of honor, and opposite of the left in every way. It is the side of righteous, and good. It is considered God's side. Does this mean that the house of Judah was righteous? Hardly. They were wicked as well, but they had not been as quick to partake of the ways of the world as the house of Israel had. Maybe this is why they were symbolized by the right hand, and why Ezekiel was to bear their iniquity for only "40" days.

Unlike the number "390", the number "40" has significant symbolic meaning in the scriptures. The following are but a few examples; Christ was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, Moses was on mount Sinai for 40 days, the great flood lasted 40 days and 40 nights, Elijah was in hiding for 40 days, the Jews wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The number forty symbolizes probation, trial,

initiation, and death. It is an elevation of the number four and therefore represents wholeness and totality. The Babylonians have a religious event which focused on the forty-day disappearance of the Pleiades, a period of rains, storms, floods, and danger. The return of Pleiades was a time of rejoicing a bundle of forty reeds was burned for the 40 days of evil.

Understanding some of the possible symbolic definitions for elements in Ezekiel's act still leaves much to understand. Many have attempted to understand the "390" years of iniquity for the house of Israel and the "40" years of iniquity for the house of Judah. The following is a list of theories that attempt to explain the symbolism.

1. Biblical historians Keil and Delitzsch suggest that the 430 days or years (390 days + 40 days) represent the number of years that Israel was held captive in Egypt. They go further to suggest that the 40 days represents the number of years from when Moses killed the Egyptian and the time of their deliverance (Old Testament Student Manual, Religion 302, page 268). Though the numbers match with those of the Egyptian occupation, the connection and purpose with Ezekiel's act is still vague. Why would the Lord want the Hebrews to focus on the captivity in Egypt? Maybe there were some parallels with the Assyrian and Babylonian occupations. The answer is unclear. It is, however interesting that the Egyptian captivity lasted exactly 430 years.
2. Many have theorized that that "390" days represents the number of years that the House of Israel, or Northern Kingdom, was involved in Idol worship as a nation. The "40" days theoretically represent the number of years that the House of Judah, or Southern Kingdom, was involved in Idol worship as a Nation. Unfortunately, the numbers and dates cannot be substantiated. This theory makes most sense in its simplicity based on all of the things that the Lord told Ezekiel about his chosen people. One small catch might be that the Kingdom of Israel, or Northern Kingdom, existed from only 975 BC to 721 BC, a period of only 254 years.
3. Another theory is that the "390" years represents the years of captivity that the House of Israel spent in Assyria, while the "40" years represents the years of captivity that the House of Judah spent in Babylon. As previously discussed, Israel only spent 95 to 109 years in captivity in Assyria, while the House

of Judah spent 70 years in Babylonian captivity. This theory doesn't seem to correspond with the Lord's message.

4. Yet another theory that is at least partially true is that Ezekiel's lying on his side represented the siege of Jerusalem. This is true as defined later in this chapter. What appears to not fit is the days and years spoken of in verses four through six. The siege of Jerusalem lasted for about 540 days. This number is far more than the mysterious 430 days and not even close to the 430 years that it is supposed to represent. Even so, the contents of the rest of the chapter fits so perfectly with this theory that one is left to wonder if the numbers weren't altered by poor translations or other events over time.
5. Though there are quite possibly many more theories on the symbolic meaning of the "390" and "40" days that Ezekiel was to lie on his side, we will conclude with one that is quite interesting. Grant R. Jeffery theorizes in his book, *"The Signature of God"*, that the 430 years is part of the prophecy that foretold when Israel would again be a free country. The theory is based on a scripture in the Old Testament where the Lord says, *"And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins"* (Leviticus 26:8). According to history, the exiles were released as Babylon fell in the spring of 536 BC. They were free to return home to a land that wasn't theirs at this point; however, 95% of the exiles remained in Babylon enjoying the wicked culture that had surrounded them. Those that did return never truly embraced the laws that they once revered. This attitude carried on for at least 430 years after the fall of Babylon. According to Jeffery, the 430 years of captivity started with the Jewish exile into Babylon in 606 BC. In the year 276 BC, Judah and Israel should have been restored according to the prophecy. Because of their stiff-neckedness and wicked ways Jeffery theorizes that the Lord multiplied the 430 years of captivity by seven according to the Old Testament law. Such a fate would result in 2,520 years of captivity. Jeffery then points out that such a fate was based on Biblical years which were only 360 days versus our present years that are based on 365.25 days to a year. If one were to convert to modern years, the years of captivity are reduced to 2,483.8 years. If one were then to advance 2,483.8 years from the fall of Babylon, which took place in 539.4 BC, keeping in mind that there was only one year between 1 BC and 1 AD, it would bring the date to 1948.4 AD.

Interestingly enough, at midnight May 15, 1948 a British mandate officially ended and proclaimed Israel as an independent state for the first time since before the days of Babylon.

Whatever theory proves to be the true interpretation of Ezekiel's skit, if any at all, it is quite sure that the Jews were being sent a message from God, and like us, if they used the Lord's spirit they surely understood the message being sent to them.

**Verse 7:** **"Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it.**

In connection with Ezekiel's year plus teaching episode where he was to lie on his side for the exiles to see (see verses four through six), the Lord explained that he was to set his face toward the siege of Jerusalem. The symbolism associated with the face typically represents one's being, personality, determination, and will. The Lord uses the same terminology and symbolism when he says of a previous generation of Israelites, *"And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you"* (Leviticus 26:17). Since it has already been defined that Ezekiel was playing the role of the Babylonians, his face should be referring to the Babylonians. The Babylonians, according to history, set all of their resources, might, and will against the city of Jerusalem. Indeed, the Babylonians set their faces against Jerusalem.

Continuing on in the verse, the Lord says to Ezekiel that his arm shall be uncovered. The arm usually symbolizes vengeance, and power. The arm of the Lord symbolized sovereign power and God's will, while the raised arm symbolizes bearing witness or taking an oath. The symbolic representation of being uncovered denotes being unrestrained, not holding back, and revealing. In summary, the might and power of the Lord shall be revealed. The Hebrews would feel the vengeance of the Lord through the Babylonian attack, and it would stand as prophecy fulfilled.

As a point of dual symbolism, the uncovering of the arm also represents the warning of the Hebrews by the Lord. In keeping with His eternal pattern, the Lord always warns his people before retribution. Nephi said, *"And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities; and never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets*

of the Lord” (2<sup>nd</sup> Nephi 25:9). Despite the severity of their sins, the Lord still sought to warn His children.

**Verse 8:** **“And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege.”**

As if laying on your side for over a year wasn't bad enough, the Lord throws a whole new twist into the act. Ezekiel must not only lie on his side, but he must do it bound. Being bound is almost obviously associated with captivity and siege. But like many symbols, there is often more than one meaning. Ezekiel's bondage could also represent the spiritual bondage of the Israelites as well as the Babylonians. There are several examples of such symbolism in the scriptures. In the Book of Psalms we read, *“Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psalms 2:3)*. The great prophet Isaiah wrote, *“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6)*? Finally, the Book of Mormon records, *“And now I say unto you, ye have been oppressed by king Noah, and have been in bondage to him and his priests, and have been brought into iniquity by them; therefore ye were bound with the bands of iniquity” (Mosiah 23:12)*.

The Lord, in reference to Ezekiel's bondage, says he would not be able to turn from one side to the other. This represents the severity of their bondage both physical and spiritual.

Finally, the Lord says that this bondage will occur until the days of the siege have ended. This verse appears to be referring to the days in which Ezekiel was to lie on his side (see verses 4-6). Here again, the 430 days that Ezekiel was asked to lie on his side don't seem to correspond with the estimated 540 days that the siege of Jerusalem took, but the words of Ezekiel seem to make a connection between the two in spite of the 110 day difference between them.

**Verse 9:** **“Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof.”**

This verse is yet more of the Lord's act that Ezekiel was to perform among the exiles. In what appears to be a bizarre turn of events the prophet is asked to collect six different grains and place them into a vessel. With these grains the prophet was to make bread from

which he was to eat during the days that he was commanded to lie on his side. One interesting note, Ezekiel was commanded to make bread for the "390" days and nothing is said of the "40" days spoken of earlier in the chapter. Whether this was omitted by scribes or has some symbolic importance is unsure.

The grains the prophet was asked to collect were very specific. He wasn't asked to gather just any grain. The grains that he was asked to collect are as follows.



**Wheat** - "A well-known valuable cereal, cultivated from the earliest times, is first mentioned in Genesis chapter thirty, verse fourteen, in the account of Jacob's sojourn with Laban in Mesopotamia. Babylonia was also noted for the excellence of its wheat and other cereals. Syria and Palestine produced wheat of fine quality and in large quantities" (Smith's Bible Dictionary, page 743-744).

**Barley** - One of the most important of the cereal grains, and the most hardy of them all. It was grown by the Hebrews, (Lev. 27:16; Deut. 8:8; Ruth 2:17, etc.) who used it for baking into bread, chiefly among the poor (Smith's Bible Dictionary, page 76).



**Beans** - "Beans are cultivated in Palestine, which produces many of the leguminous order of plants, such as lentils, kidney beans, vetches, etc." (Smith's Bible Dictionary, page 79).

**Lentiles** - "A leguminous plant bearing seeds resembling small beans. The red pottage which Jacob prepared and for which Esau sold his birthright was made from them. Lentil bread is eaten by the poor of Egypt. Some feel that the Catholic lent derived its name from the lentile" (Smith's Bible Dictionary, page 354).







**Millet** - “A kind of grain. A number of species are cultivated in the East. When green it is used as fodder, and for bread when ripe” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary, page 406-407).

**Fitches** - “Or Vetches, an herbaceous annual plant belonging to the natural Ranunculaceæ (the buttercup family), which grows in the south of Europe and in the north of Africa. Its black seeds are used like pepper, and have almost as pungent a taste. The Syrians sprinkle these seeds over their flat cakes before they are baked” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary, page 195-196). There are many that feel the word fitches is in reality referring to spelt, which is a type of wheat.



Such grains were typically the food of the poor, and the fact that they were mixed to make bread not only represented poverty but famine. This was quite appropriate symbolism for a siege that caused starvation and a significant shortage of food within Jerusalem. The six grains being brought into one vessel, or pot, also represents the fact that many nations were being conquered by Babylon and the citizens taken exile into Babylon. The grains represented many walks of life and cultures, all being brought together into the vessel of Babylon.



**Verse 10:** “**And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it.**”

The Hebrew translation for the word used in the King James Translation that was translated as meat, is better translated from the Hebrew as food. The Lord is probably still speaking of the bread Ezekiel was asked to make in verse nine.

Ezekiel was told that not only was his diet for the year plus that he was to lie on his side to consist of this six grain bread, but it was also to be limited. He was to ration out his bread by weight. He was only allowed twenty shekels a day. A shekel was the base monetary unit of the Hebrews; however, it did not take the form of currency until approximately the year 140 BC. Prior to this time the shekel was simply a standard for silver. Most all valuables of the time were referenced to shekels. Assuming the weight of a shekel has remained constant, that

would make a shekel equal to 0.5 ounces. This would in turn mean that Ezekiel was limited to only 10 ounces of meat per day.

One slice of wonder bread equals approximately 1 ounce. Hence, Ezekiel was allowed only 10 slices of bread per day. This has obvious reference to the poor conditions the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be under during the great siege by Babylon.

**Verse 11:** **“Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink.”**

Like food, the inhabitants of Jerusalem would also be limited with respects to water. To convey this great prophesy, the Lord instructs Ezekiel that he was to limit or ration himself water while he laid for a year and some as a sign of prophesy to the Jews. During his lay, the prophet was told he could only drink a sixth of a hin per day. A hin was an ancient measurement for volume used by the Hebrews. Flavius Josephus records that a hin, through modern calculation, was the equivalent to 1.4449 U.S. gallons. While the mainstream Jewish record that a hin was equivalent to 0.7381 U.S. gallons. If Ezekiel was rationed to but a 6<sup>th</sup> of a hin, we can surmise he was allowed just 0.2408 U.S. Gallons (2.01 pounds or 30.8224 fluid ounces) according to Josephus and 0.1230 U.S. Gallons (1.03 pounds or 15.7440 fluid ounces) according to the Rabbis.

**Verse 12:** **“And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight.”**

Barley cakes were made by grinding the grain into a flour, and adding base ingredients to produce a crude unleavened bread. The bread was of course baked and served as a common food especially among the poor of the time. In the contents of this prophesy, the barley cakes are most probably made from the six grains spoken of earlier.

The Israelites were under strict code to remain pure. This included the food they ate, how they prepared it, and where it came from. The Lord, among many other related commandments, told the Israelites, *“Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk”* (Deuteronomy 14:21).

Eating food prepared with heat generated from burning human feces was unclean and an abomination according to their law. Ezekiel was asked to violate this law to further convey the Lord's message. The living conditions in Jerusalem during the time of the 540 day Babylonian siege were so bad that people had to use their own dried

feces for fuel to cook and stay warm. Notice that the Lord told Ezekiel to do this in their sight. This would have obviously been a difficult thing for Ezekiel to do, but it showed the Israelites just how far the Lord was going to humble them.

**Verse 13:** **"And the LORD said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them."**

Adding to the message the Lord was sending in verse twelve, there is another symbolic message enclosed. The children of Israel would be forced to eat and live off of what ever the Lord sees fit to provide them. Since it is apparent they were going to be a captive people, and food made in the hands of foreigners or gentiles (people that were not part of the Abrahamic Covenant) was defiled, Israel was looking at many courses of defiled food. The prophet Hosea sums their fate up the best when he says, *"Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor. The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her. They shall not dwell in the LORD'S land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria"* (Hosea 9:1-3).

The Lord concludes the verse by indicating he would drive the Jews among the Gentiles. How have the Jews been driven? History shows that the Jews have been driven among all nations. They were oppressed by Rome, ruled over by Muslims, condemned by Christians, killed by Hitler's Nazis and driven from land to land with no land to call their own.

**Verse 14-15:** **"Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith."**

Ezekiel appears to have kept himself clean and free of the sins of his generation. This is somewhat evident in the fact that as the Lord asks him to carry out this difficult act, he pleads with the Lord and says all his days he has obeyed the law.

After a period of instruction from the Lord, Ezekiel replies with an expression of despair. He sighs "Ah" Lord GOD. The term "Ah" is used to express various emotions. It can symbolize joy, grief, despair, excitement, or a litany of other feelings. Based on Ezekiel's response in


the remainder of verse fourteen and fifteen it is used as an expression of displeasure as well as despair.

Ezekiel seems to be troubled by the Lord's request that he prepare his food with human excrement. This is not only based on the fact it would be a rather disgusting and unclean act, but it also defied the laws the Lord had given the Israelites to live by. Ezekiel pleads with the Lord that he might not be required to perform such an act. He justifies his plea by stating he has kept the laws of cleanliness from his youth. He even quotes part of the law found in the Book of Leviticus which says, *"That which dieth of itself, or is torn with beasts, he shall not eat to defile himself therewith: I am the LORD"* (Leviticus 22:8). and *"And the fat of the beast that dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn with beasts, may be used in any other use: but ye shall in no wise eat of it"* (Leviticus 7:24).

An interesting point in association with the Lord's request for Ezekiel to defy the law and prepare his food in an unclean fashion comes from another passage of the law found in Leviticus. It says, *"And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings be eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be imputed unto him that offereth it: it shall be an abomination, and the soul that eateth of it shall bear his iniquity"* (Leviticus 7:18). The prophet Ezekiel was previously told he would bear the iniquity for the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It could very well be implied that Ezekiel's partaking of food that was unclean was symbolic of him bearing the sins of his people.

The Lord was receptive to the prophet's plea. He did not totally remove His instructions but He offered to exchange the use of human excrement for cow dung. The question might be asked why this would be considered a more pleasant alternative. *"Dried ox and cow dung is a common fuel in the east; and with this, for want of wood and coal, they are obligated to prepare their food. Indeed, dried excrement of every kind is gathered. Here the prophet is to prepare his bread with dry human excrement...This was required to show the extreme degree of wretchedness to which they should be exposed; for, not being able to leave the city to collect the dried excrements of beasts, the inhabitants during the siege would be obligated, literally, to use dried human ordure for fuel. The very circumstances show that this was the plain fact of the case. However, we find that the prophet was relieved from using this kind of fuel, for cow's dung was substituted at his request"* (Clark, Commentary, 4:434-435). The Lord made the task somewhat more acceptable to the prophet by his exchange; however, the task was still unpleasant and carried the same message to the Israelites.

**Verse 16:** **“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:”**

In explanation for His instructions, the Lord explains the meaning behind verses twelve to fifteen. He tells the prophet that he would ‘*break the staff of bread in Jerusalem*’. Bread symbolizes life. It is the fuel that powers the body. In the sacrament the bread symbolizes not only nourishment of the body but also of the spirit. Together with the water it symbolizes the uniting of the body and the spirit. The bread also represents the physical. Bread is often used in the scriptures to symbolize food in general. The staff symbolizes authority, pilgrimage, support and sustaining. It is the attribute of all good shepherds. The staff is that which upholds. Breaking the staff of bread would then  symbolize the destruction of the food supply in Jerusalem. Such terminology is common in ancient scripture. In the Book of Leviticus we read, “*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*” (Leviticus 26:26). In a verse that somewhat defines the term, the psalmist wrote, “*Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread*” (Psalm 105:16). Finally, the great prophet Isaiah prophesied of the very same period that Ezekiel was going to prophesy of in his symbolic act by saying, “*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*” (Isaiah 3:1).

The Israelites in Jerusalem were going to be faced with a lack of food that would cause a rationing of food. They would be required to eat their food by weight, symbolizing the fact that each person would only be allowed a specific amount of food per day. This was previously mentioned in verse ten.

In like manner, the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not only find themselves with a lack of food, but a lack of water as well. This was also previously mentioned in verse eleven. Jerusalem used a natural spring outside of the city for the source of their water. Trips were made with donkey and by foot to obtain water daily. The city had several large pools they filled with water from the spring as reservoirs. Under siege the city was cut off from the water source and would be required to ration water.

At the conclusion of the verse, the Lord states this would occur under astonishment (meaning the inhabitants of Jerusalem would receive the conditions with great amazement and disbelief). The Israelites were a proud and arrogant people who refused to admit their

sins or the fact that the Lord would allow His people to be destroyed. Despite the fact that the Lord's people had been subject to tribulation for hundreds of years, they had always prevailed. This time however, they had lost the Lord's support.

**Verse 17:** **"That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity."**

According to the American Heritage dictionary of the English Language, the word "*astonied*" means being in a bewildered state; dazed. The children of Israel will meet the Lord's plague with extreme surprise. The Hebrew translation for the word used in the King James Translation was translated as *astonied*, is said to be better translated from the Hebrew as *appalled*. If the word "*appalled*" is the word that was really used, it would show the extremely rebellious attitude of the Israelites.

The Lord concludes this chapter with the statement that the prophetic events will "*consume away for their iniquity*". To truly understand what the Lord means in this passage it is appropriate to turn to the Book of Mormon. Throughout the Book of Mormon and the Book of Ether, we can clearly see a pattern that mankind has a tendency to follow. The following example shows this pattern.

*"And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him. Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One--yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity. And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. O how foolish, and how vain, and*

*how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world! Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths! Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide. O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth” (Helaman 12:1-7).*

The Lord seems to follow a specific pattern when dealing with His children. As men are righteous, they are blessed. As the Lord blesses His people they become rich and prosperous. Unfortunately, the children of the Lord often respond to the Lord's blessings by becoming prideful. Pridefulness is the road to wickedness. The proud people of the Lord stop relying on His strength and sink deeper and deeper into sin and iniquity. Once the Lord's people have become wicked the Lord sends prophets to warn them of the consequences of their actions. Typically wicked people refuse the counsel of the prophets. As a result, the Lord sends all manner of trials to the people. This is done not so much as a punishment, but rather a tool for causing the Lord's people to turn their thoughts and trust back to Him. Once the Lord's children humble themselves, they repent of their sins, and consequently the Lord forgives them of their sins. After being forgiven, they are again righteous and worthy of the Lord's blessings.



This pattern causes the consuming away of iniquity. Ezekiel was to act as one of the many warnings sent to the Lord's wicked children. Through the Lord's prophets the Lord revealed the trials and tribulation that would come upon the Israelites. Hopefully the children of the Lord would turn their hearts back toward the Lord.



**Chapter Summary:**

This chapter could be titled as *"The Lord's Warning and Siege on Jerusalem by the Babylonians"*. Using rich symbols in a skit that lasted over a year, the Lord instructed and warned all of the Israelites who would give ear. It revealed the fact that Babylon would lay siege to Jerusalem. The siege would bring about famine. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would be rationed for both food and water. This occurred as the city of Jerusalem was encompassed by the Babylonians who refused any exit or entry into the city. The Babylonians would build forts, mounds, and battering rams for use against the Israelites.



During the time of the siege, which lasted 540 days, the living conditions in Jerusalem were extremely poor. People were forced to use human excrement for fuel and eat the basest of foods.

