

~DOVES DUNG (129)

- The description of the siege of Samaria by Syrian King Ben-hadad relates that the famine created became so severe that an ass's head got to be worth eighty silver pieces, and the fourth of a cab measure of doves dung was worth five silver pieces.

- And it came about afterward that Ben-hadad the king of Syria proceeded to collect all his camp together and to go up and besiege Samaria. (2 Kings 6:24)

- In time a great famine arose in Samaria, and, look! They were besieging it until an ass's head got to be worth eighty silver pieces, and the fourth of a cab measure of **doves dung** was worth five silver pieces. (2 Kings 6:25)

- The cost of an ass's head was approximately \$176, if the silver pieces were shekels, and the fourth of a cab measure 0.3 Liters (0.55 dry pints] of **doves dung** was worth about \$11. This indicates that, because of the scarcity of food, such a thing as the bony, thinly fleshed ass's head became an expensive food item, although the ass was an unclean animal according to the Mosaic Law, and even **doves dung** was very costly.

- The reference to **doves dung** has occasioned considerable discussion as to whether the term is literal and as to the use to which it was put by the buyer.

- Arguments have been advanced that the term **doves dung** may have been applied to a certain plant. However, there is no evidence that the plants referred to by those favoring this view were ever known by the name **doves dung** or that such plants would be accessible to the people bottled up in Samaria by the siege.

- Those who acknowledge a literal meaning of the expression are, in turn, divided as to the use made of the substance. Some point out that **doves dung** has long been used as a fertilizer by people in the Middle East in the cultivation of melons, but it seems reasonable that persons bordering on death by starvation would be concerned with food for immediate consumption rather than with a crop that would not be available for perhaps several months.

- Many prefer the view that the **doves dung** was actually used for food, pointing out that the subject is that of famine and the terrible extremes to which human's are driven by the pangs of hunger.
- Though purposely extreme and cruel in order to create a weakening fear, the threat by Sennacherib's officer, Rabshakeh, that a siege by Assyria would cause the people of Jerusalem to have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine may have had some basis in fact.
- But Rabshakeh said to them; Is it to your lord and to you that my lord has sent me to speak these words? Is it not to the men sitting upon the wall, that they may eat their own excrement and drink their own urine with you men? (**2 Kings 18:27**)
- While the thought of using literal **dung** for human consumption is extremely repulsive, that in itself is no basis for rejecting this view. The fact that the hunger was so great in Samaria that women would boil and eat their own children indicates that they had reached the point of consuming anything available.
- And it came about as the king of Israel was passing along upon the wall that a certain woman cried out to him, saying; Do save, O my lord the king! (**2 Kings 6:26**)
- To this he said; If Yehowah does not save you, from what source shall I save you? either from the threshing floor or from the wine or oil press? (**2 Kings 6:27**)
- And the king went on to say to her; What is the matter with you? So she said; This very woman said to me; Give your son that we may eat him today, and my own son we shall eat tomorrow. (**2 Kings 6:28**)
- Accordingly we boiled my son and ate him. Then I said to her on the next day; Give your son that we may eat him. But she hid her son. (**2 Kings 6:29**)
- While some point out that dung would have little value as a nutrient, this factor alone would not disprove the possibility of its being purchased for food, for starving persons are frequently irrational, eating anything to deaden the pangs of hunger.

- Perhaps an even more likely suggestion is that of certain rabbi's who hold that the **dung** was used for fuel. There is some Biblical parallel in this, since the prophet Ezekiel was instructed to picture the equally dire siege conditions due to come upon Jerusalem by cooking his food with **dung** as the fuel.
- And as a round cake of barley you will eat it, and as for it, upon **dung cakes** of the excrement of mankind you will bake it before their eyes. ([Ezekiel 4:12](#))
- And Yehowah went on to say; Just like this the sons of Israel will eat their bread unclean among the nations to which I shall disperse them. ([Ezekiel 4:13](#))
- And I proceeded to say; Alas, O Sovereign Lord Yehowah! Look! My soul is not a defiled one, neither a body already dead nor a torn animal have I eaten from my youth up, even until now, and into my mouth there has come no foul flesh. ([Ezekiel 4:14](#))
- Accordingly he said to me; See, I have given you cattle manure instead of the **dung cakes of mankind**, and you must make your bread upon it. ([Ezekiel 4:15](#))
- And he continued saying to me; **Son of man, here I am breaking the rods around which ring-shaped loaves are suspended**, in Jerusalem, and they will have to eat bread by weight and in anxious care, and it will be by measure and in horror that they will drink water itself. ([Ezekiel 4:16](#))
- To the intent that **they may be lacking bread and water** and they may look astonished at one another and rot away in their error. ([Ezekiel 4:17](#))
- **Dried cattle dung, called cow chips** by some, serves as a common fuel in many parts of the earth till this day. If this view should be correct, then the account might simply be stating the cost of the food in this case an ass's head and the cost of the fuel for cooking it. The succeeding verses indicate that the people were as yet not eating the flesh raw.