

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"Hole Hearted"

12:1-16

I was at work in Riverside, inside a building, the morning that the Panorama Fire got out of control in San Bernardino. Coming out of a building the sky was dark and ash was falling - some thirty miles away!

I couldn't get hold of Pam so I decided to go home. It grew darker and darker as I approached San Bernardino. Pam was busy indoors with her daily activities taking care of Mary and our dog, Koby. She had no idea a major fire was now just a few miles away.

Evacuation hadn't been ordered but I thought it prudent. We drove a 1979 Honda Prelude. The baby, the dog, and a few pictures were all we could carry off.

The Panorama Fire of November 1980 is still one of California's worst fires. It engulfed almost 24,000 acres, destroying 280 homes and damaging 49 others. My brother, who lived maybe five miles north of us, had the houses on both sides of his destroyed. Four civilian deaths and seventy-seven injuries were reported.

It was one of several times living in that area when decisions had to be made about what to take during an evacuation.

Zedekiah had been set-up by Babylon to rule Judah from Jerusalem as its king. Against the counsel of Jeremiah, Zedekiah would rebel against

Babylon by forming an alliance with Egypt. It would force Babylon to lay siege to Jerusalem. During the siege Zedekiah would try to evacuate but he would be captured.

Ezekiel was ministering to the exiles in Babylon. The Jews still held out false hope they would soon return to Jerusalem. Ezekiel was called upon to act-out another drama before them. He acted the part of an evacuee. It was to represent to them what would befall Zedekiah.

Ezekiel 12:1 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

Ezekiel 12:2 "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel 12:3 "Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel 12:4 By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity.

Ezekiel 12:5 Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it.

Ezekiel 12:6 In their sight you shall bear them on your shoulders and carry them out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel."

God was going to make Ezekiel a "sign" to the rebellious Jews. He was going to have Ezekiel act-out a scene before them. He was going to evacuate.

The "wall" Ezekiel would dig through was probably the wall of his own house! Has God ever asked you to do something that is a little bit strange? I think He has; the real question is, Did you do it?

Somehow word got around that Ezekiel was going to act-out another drama. A crowd gathered - probably waiting for him to come outside. Instead they first heard scraping, then saw a hole beginning to form in the wall of Ezekiel's house. Eventually the opening was large enough for the prophet to squeeze through.

Digging through the wall indicated that normal travel was impossible. If you were going to evacuate, you'd need to do it with stealth. This was no natural disaster but a siege from an invading force.

He had certain "belongings" that you might carry if you were going into "captivity." We can't say for certain if they were canteens or pots and pans - only that when you saw him carrying them you knew he was not coming back but planning to live as an exile.

I think of Samwise Gamgee, the hobbit companion of Frodo, as he was depicted in the film version of *The Lord of the Rings*. He's carrying pots and pans, a bedroll, and other miscellaneous items necessary for a journey into exile.

"Captivity" is the key word, repeated six times. Maybe there was a big captivity-industry in Jerusalem and Babylon. Maybe there were survivalists who suggested a list of how to evacuate at a moment's notice.

I'm tempted to apply this to us as believers in terms of keeping our contact with the world as light as possible but I don't think that's really a good corollary. Ezekiel was talking to a rebellious people about being besieged and having to flee for their lives - not about wanton materialism.

Is there an application for us? I think it is that you and I are to be like Ezekiel. We are to live in such a way as to be able to represent to nonbelievers that the Lord is coming!

You see, nonbelievers are a little like the rebellious Jews in that they don't believe judgment is coming. We know that it is - in the form of the Great Tribulation. Believers of the church age will be resurrected and raptured leaving behind the nonbelievers. There will be no escaping the tribulation of those days - no where to run and hide.

I don't think God wants us to adopt any kind of 'survivalist' mentality. We need to be around nonbelievers up until the rapture so that they can be saved by our testimony and example.

Our task is not to survive but to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 12:7 So I did as I was commanded. I brought out my belongings by day, as though going into captivity, and at evening I dug through the wall with my hand. I brought them out at twilight, and I bore them on my shoulder in their sight.

Ezekiel did what he was told. He acted-out the part, acted-out the drama.

Usually in the Bible the idea of “acting” is portrayed as a negative. We read of hypocrites in the New Testament and realize that the word comes from the Greek and means *wearing a mask*. The Greek actors were hypocrites - wearing a mask, playing a part. It is applied to those who act spiritual but who have only a false, external righteousness rather than a true, internal one.

In this case the concept of acting-out is a good one. We are to act like believers! To act according to our belief. When people see your life they should see a person who acts accordingly.

Have you ever told someone, “Act your age?” That’s the idea here. Act like a Christian!

Having said that, I would qualify it by reminding us that we are to act-out what God has worked-in us. We are to be true actors rather than hypocrites hiding behind a mask of self-righteousness.

You might have noted (v6) that Ezekiel was told to hide his identity by covering his face while evacuating. That’s because he was acting-out the fate of Zedekiah - and that guy would need to try and not be recognized.

Ezekiel explained his one-act play in the next set of verses.

Ezekiel 12:8 And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
Ezekiel 12:9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'

Apparently the crowd gathered around Ezekiel's house did not catch the significance of his actions.

Ever feel like your witness is having no effect on those around you? Well, it could be because you're blowing it!

But probably it has to do with the hardness of the hearts of those nonbelievers around you.

Hard hearts can be broken! We are all familiar with the effect running or dripping water can have on even the hardest rock. Over time it smooths, it penetrates. So can God's living water when it is dispensed by you over time.

The explanation to the people didn't come till the following morning. They had to return to hear it.

We certainly don't suggest you toy with nonbelievers by waiting to close the deal. But these people were God's people and the Lord made them wait a day to hear the explanation.

Sometimes God's people in the church are a little hardened. It can take some time for the Word to penetrate. Keep pouring it.

Ezekiel 12:10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them." '

This "burden," meaning the prophecy, was mostly about Zedekiah. Ezekiel always referred to him as a "prince" because he was not the rightful king.

The "house of Israel" were those still in Jerusalem. They, too, would try to evacuate. But the focus here was on Zedekiah.

Ezekiel 12:11 Say, 'I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.'

God had made up His mind. Siege and all that followed from it was coming.

Ezekiel 12:12 And the prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes.

Ezekiel 12:13 I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there.

The historical account of the fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Second Kings 25:1-7.

2 Kings 25:1 Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around.

2 Kings 25:2 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

2 Kings 25:3 By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

2 Kings 25:4 Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain.

2 Kings 25:5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him.

2 Kings 25:6 So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him.

2 Kings 25:7 Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

It was that yet future scene that Ezekiel had acted-out for the exiles.

Ezekiel 12:14 I will scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops; and I will draw out the sword after them.

Ezekiel 12:15 "Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries.

The conquering Babylonians, as well as other nations in the world, would think that God was not mighty to save His people. In fact, He was. They

were overrun as a punishment and Babylon, far from being superior, was nothing more than a rod of discipline in God's mighty-to-save hand.

There would be no going back to Jerusalem - not for seventy years.

Ezekiel 12:16 But I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go. Then they shall know that I am the Lord."

God always intended Israel to be a testimony to the other nations of the world. Even in her sin the Lord would use her to give testimony. The remnant would declare to the other nations how terrible were the sins of Israel and how just was the punishment of God.

In the New Testament we read of Ananias and Saphira. You remember them. They were the couple who sold a piece of land then lied about the proceeds. God killed them one at a time.

They *were* a testimony - **just not the kind they had anticipated.**

You and I are always giving testimony through our lives. What am I saying? What are you saying?

The Jews in and outside of Jerusalem just wanted things to get back to normal. Since they had a heritage of godliness, they thought God would cover for them while they sinned grossly.

Most secular people I know want things to get back to their idea of 'normal.' But they don't want to factor in God. They want to go about either indifferent to Him or ignoring Him or acting immorally.

A siege they cannot escape is coming. It's coming soon. It's up to us to give testimony that Jesus is the only way of escape.