

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 1:1-3

Topic

The destruction of Solomon's Temple and the deportation of Jews to Babylon cancelled Ezekiel from serving as a *kohanim* in the Temple

Title

"I Coulda Been A Kohanim"

We recognize certain milestone birthdays and set them apart for special observation and celebration.

- 16 Driver's license
- 18 Reaching adulthood
- 40 Midlife
- 65 Traditional retirement age
- 100 Less than 1% of the US population lives for a century

In Mexico and other Latin American cultures the 15th birthday for young ladies is celebrated with a quinceañera.

In Judaism, a *bar mitzvah* (for boys at 13) and *bat mitzvah* (for girls at 12) mark their coming of age.

In Israel among the male descendants of Levi's son, Aaron, birthdays at 25yrs, 30yrs, & 50yrs are significant.

- In Numbers 4:23 we are told, "From **30** years old and above, even to **50** years old [Levites] enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting."

- A few chapters later we read this clarification. "This *is* what *pertains* to the Levites: From **25** years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meetings" (23:24-26).

From age 25 until turning 30 the Levites apprenticed. At 30 they began their service. Retirement was mandatory at age 50.

We learn immediately that Ezekiel was a "priest" (1:3) entering his "30th year."

What ought to have been a *milestone* was more like a *crushing millstone*.

Ezekiel did not write *to us*, but *what he wrote is still for us*. "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable **for** doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (Second Timothy 3:16-17).

When the apostle Paul wrote those words, "all scripture" was the Hebrew Bible we call the OT. The NT was still being written.

I'll organize my comments around two questions: **#1 How Would You Describe What Jesus Is Doing *In You & Through You?***, and **#2 How Would Others Describe What Jesus Is Doing *In You & Through You?***

#1 - How Would You Describe What Jesus Is Doing *In You & Through You* (v1)

It is not uncommon for an interviewer to ask you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

In Israel, if you were a descendant of Aaron, you were going to be a priest, a *kohan* (*kohanim* is plural).

Ezekiel knew what he was going to be as an adult. Only, when the time came, it was not possible:

- King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem in 606BC during the reign of Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim surrendered to him. Nebuchadnezzar took some of the Temple treasures and prisoners, among whom were Daniel and his three companions.

- Nebuchadnezzar returned in 597BC. King Jehoiakim had died and was followed by Jehoaichin, who reigned for only three months. He was taken captive to Babylon with the remainder of the Temple treasures and other prisoners, among whom was Ezekiel.
- The Babylonians returned to Jerusalem in 586BC and destroyed the Temple and the city.

Levites were not priests the way we think of them. Zachary Garris writes, "The Levites were not just priests - *they were warrior-priests*. Their priestly origin is based in righteous violence. But God put the violent nature of the Levites to good use. Not only would the priests among them slaughter animals on a regular basis for sacrifice, but also all the Levites would guard the Tabernacle & Temple and the cities of refuge. Yahweh ordained and scattered the Levites throughout Israel in order to guard His worship."

What does he mean by "righteous violence?" When, for example, the Israelites worshipped the Golden Calf, Moses called for "every man [to] put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' " So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day" (Exodus 32:27-28).

NT believers are warrior-priests:

- The Church is called "priests" in Revelation 1:6.
- We are warriors, told to put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6) and to become skillful utilizing various spiritual weaponry (Second Corinthians 10:4).

How is the warfare for you? What fronts are you fighting on? Where are you behind enemy lines? Are there chinks in your armor? Are you wounded? Are you getting more proficient with spiritual weapons, or are you trusting in the methods of the world and the strength of the flesh?

Ezk 1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar...

Ezekiel was living in Babylon, down by the river.

Historians and Bible commentators are thankful for Ezekiel's careful keeping track of time. But when somebody is that careful keeping track of days, it communicates a

deep longing. Think of your kids counting how many 'sleeps' until you are taking them somewhere fun.

Ezekiel's longing is captured in Psalm 137.

Psa 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.

Psa 137:2 We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it.

Psa 137:3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us *requested* mirth, *Saying*, "Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion!"

Psa 137:4 How shall we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land?

Psa 137:5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget *its skill!*

Psa 137:6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth - If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.

Psa 137:7 Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze *it*, raze *it*, To its very foundation!"

Psa 137:8 O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!

Psa 137:9 Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock!

NT believers wait with a deep desire.

We "wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (First Thessalonians 1:10). Knowing I could be with Jesus right now, I am motivated to invest myself serving Him today.

The conditions of the Babylonian captivity weren't severe. In fact, when it ended and they could return home, most Jews chose to stay and live under Persian rule.

Looking around... Things are getting severe. Do you say, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" Or are we becoming too comfy-cozy?

Scholars have done the math. Ezekiel was taken captive at age 25, just when he would have begun his apprenticeship. The first vision came to him *on the day of his 30th birthday*.

God did not need Ezekiel to priest in captivity, but rather to prophesy.

Ezk 1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

How are we to understand the “visions?” A commentary I consulted said, “One of the unusual parts of Ezekiel’s experience seems to be that he was physically taken away by the Spirit of God while the hand of God was upon him, and that he was returned to his place among the exiles at the end of his vision. We conclude this from the reference in a later chapter that reads: “Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound. The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went with the strong hand of the Lord upon me.”

Ezekiel was the first believer to be caught up & away bodily.

Before moving on, I want to mention the modern-day *kohanim*. How can they be identified?

Geneticist Dr. David Goldstein says, “[As it turns out] almost 100% of all men with family tradition of priesthood *do* descend from *kohanim*. Generation after generation of Jewish women were faithful to their husbands and their tradition. What a proud record of fidelity. Geneticists describe these results as “the highest record of paternity-certainty ever recorded... Date calculation based on the variation of the mutations among *kohanim* today yields a time frame of 106 generations from the ancestral founder of the line, some 3,300 years ago.” **This exactly supports the tradition of descent from Aaron, brother of Moses.**

Many modern Jews with the surname Cohen & Kahn are *kohanim*.

The Nezer HaKodesh Institute for Kohanic Studies is teaching Jewish priests to perform Temple service for the Third Temple.

#2 - How Would Others Describe What Jesus Is Doing In You & Through You? (v2-3)

Take time to source a claim before you Insta, FaceBook, or X. It will keep you from furthering false rumors, like “ABC Refused to Renew Whoopi Goldberg’s and Joy Behar’s Contracts for *The View* for being toxic.”

The next two verses read like an independent Fact Check, verifying what Ezekiel said in verse one.

Ezk 1:2 On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity,

In this third-person account Ezekiel is being vetted. It's a spiritual background check so the reader can be comfortable the priest was indeed raised-up as God's prophet.

Ezk 1:3 the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.

The LSV (Literal Standard Version) of verse three reads, "the word of YHWH has certainly been to Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans, by the river Chebar, and there is on him there a hand of YHWH.

It's the findings of his vetting. Ezekiel is a bonafide prophet operating in the sphere of God's almighty power.

There are no prophets today.

There is the Gift of Prophecy. It is a gift from God the Holy Spirit for some (not all) believers. It is exercised to benefit & bless the Church as discussed at length in First Corinthians 14.

In our fellowship it mostly takes the form of God the Holy Spirit impressing on a person to call our attention to a particular Scripture. Often that Scripture, or several taken together, speak encouragement to the gathering - and to someone in particular.

We would also acknowledge dreams and waking dreams, i.e., visions, as forms of Church Age prophecy.

The person speaking needs to be vetted. What they've said needs to be judged by the written Word.

If ultimately the Gift of Prophecy is the application of the written, complete Bible, *why do we exercise it?*

- The Bible presents it as a gift that has not ceased. I do not have the freedom to ignore it simply because it is controversial.

- A large portion of First Corinthians is dedicated to the proper exercise of gifts, prophecy being an important one. Why so much instruction about the so-called Sign Gifts if they were to shortly cease?
- Nowhere can we honestly prove from Scripture that certain gifts, like prophecy, have ceased. Cessationists mostly criticize the very real abuses of the gifts. But this requires correction, not cessation.
- On a personal level, it is humbling and intimate for the Lord to speak to you using independent means. Sure, you can search out verses from *Nave's Topical Bible*. But when the Word speaks to you in a live setting, it can be precious.

Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, had been prophesying for about 35 years to this point. Daniel was just beginning his amazing ministry and was at the heart of the action in the very courts of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon.

Ezekiel was stuck out along the River Chebar, a canal that was connected to the River Euphrates, in a Jewish settlement. He was out in the sticks, in Riverdale, a nobody, a priest who would never serve in the Temple.

Is "the hand of the Lord upon [us] here" in the sticks by the Kings River?

One way to determine an answer is to read Jesus' letters to seven churches in the opening chapters of the Revelation. It is our belief that *each* letter was written to *every* church. Yes, the letter to, say, the Church in Philadelphia was for that spiritual community, at that time. But the things the Lord says to them are applicable to any Church, any time they find themselves like Philadelphia.

One argument in favor of that is the fact they all end with Jesus saying, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (plural).

Another argument in favor of their being written to every church is that some of the rewards promised to a church are elsewhere promised to all believers.

We can read the letters asking, "How are we *like* or *unlike* each church?" Would Jesus commend us for certain things, or criticize us?

The heavens opened for Ezekiel. The heavens will open for us:

1Th 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Th 4:17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

1Th 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Secret rapture is a term frequently used as a pejorative by those who deny the idea that the rapture of the church is separate from the Second Coming of Christ. Do you think graves opening to release the dead in Christ will happen in secret? Christians alive at the time will be flying airplanes, driving cars. It won't be very secret when the co-pilot announces over the comm, "Ladies & gentlemen, the Captain was just raptured, and I cannot raise LAX air traffic control. I suggest you buckle-up... **And receive the Lord.**"

- Maybe the Gideon's could explore having a Bible in the storage compartment of airline seats?
- Or Franklin Graham can record a 90sec evangelism video to play?

Billy Graham once said, *"Jesus wants to give you hope for the future. He wants you to learn what it means to walk with Him every day. When you come to Jesus, God gives you eternal life - which begins right now as you open your heart to Him."*