

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 5:1-17

Topic

Ezekiel's 431-day physical theater presentation of the inevitable third & final siege of Jerusalem ends with him shaving his hair & beard with a sword.

Title

"To Baldly Go Where No Prophet Has Gone Before"

Christian Bale lost over 60 pounds for his performance in *The Machinist*, then bulked up by gaining 100 pounds to portray Batman.

It's a thing in Hollywood for an actor to make drastic physical transformations. It's nothing new. It was a thing among the Jewish exiles who lived in Babylon.

Ezekiel performed a one-man physical theater for 430 days. He took on the role of a Jewish citizen trying to survive behind the walls of the besieged city of Jerusalem. Starvation was a major theme of his performance. He daily ate a tiny ration of a kind of unhealthful bread cooked using cow dung for fire.

Is there any doubt that Ezekiel was emaciated, weak, and atrophied by the end?

The LORD likes to give us symbols and signs. Signs are never meant to to confuse, but rather to clarify. As a rule He normally explains His symbols & signs in the same chapter, or elsewhere in the Bible.

The LORD's explanation for Ezekiel's performance is verses five, six, and eight: "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'This *is* Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and

the countries all around her. She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that *are* all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Indeed I, even I, *am* against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.'" Twice the LORD mentions that Jerusalem is in the midst of "countries all around her." How many times does He use the word "nations?" Seven; that's a lot.

The LORD chose Jerusalem to be the spiritual center of the Earth. Every other country should be understood as placed around her in order that they, too, might believe and be saved.

They rebelled. Instead of teaching the Gentiles about the righteousness of God, they adopted the practices of the Gentile's 'gods.' The LORD said, " 'Therefore, *as* I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'surely, because you have defiled My Sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish *you*;' (v11).

Ezekiel embodied, physically & spiritually, what it meant to be diminished.

Can Christians ever be described as being "diminished" by God? The church in Ephesus would answer, "Yes, a church can be diminished." Jesus revealed to them that they had left their first love. The Lord told them He would "remove their lampstand." Albert Barnes writes, "The meaning is, that the Church gave light in Ephesus; and that what He would do in regard to that place would be like removing a lamp, and leaving a place in darkness."

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Have Roles To Play In The Drama Of Redemption**, and **#2 You Have Direction To Follow In The Drama Of Redemption**.

#1 - You Have Roles To Play In The Drama Of Redemption (v1-4)

This book opened on Ezekiel's 30th birthday. It was the day he ought to have begun a twenty-year career as a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead he was one of the exiles removed from Jerusalem to Babylon in the second of three sieges. The message he received in a visit from the LORD was that the Temple, and Jerusalem, would be leveled & looted.

He is now more than a year into his new ministry as a prophetic performer. We don't get a detailed description of his physical condition, but we don't need one. Based on his diet & daily routine, and the fact he was portraying a people who would gradually starve to death, he was in starvation shape as he comes to his final performance in chapter five.

Can you think of a Bible character whose role did not involve suffering, sorrowing, grief, despair? I wonder in Heaven if they don't try to one-up themselves?

Ezk 5:1 "And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair.

Can you even imagine what shaving your head & beard would be like using a battle sword? The swords could be up to 40" long!

Shaving-off your hair and beard was symbolic of things like sorrow and judgment. For Ezekiel, who was a priest, it was a reproach.

The day he shaved had to be the final act of the final performance. The 'run' of his physical theater was 430 days of lying on his sides plus one day of shaving.

Ezk 5:2 You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them.

Ezk 5:3 You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment.

Ezk 5:4 Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel.

He weighed his hair into three equal piles:

1. The first pile of hair was burned in a fire.
2. The second pile was chopped at by the sword.
3. The third and final portion was tossed up into the air to be carried by the wind.

Crawling on the ground, Ezekiel recovered a few of the hairs scattered by the wind and tucked them into the folds of his garment. He took some of the rescued hair from his garment and threw it into the fire to be burned.

Ezekiel's hair represented what would happen to the Jerusalem Jews:

1. The portion burned in the fire represented the citizens who would die in the hardship of the siege.
2. The hair chopped by the sword represented those who would die once the gates were breached.
3. And the final portion, scattered by the wind, represented those fleeing from the city in every direction after its fall.

Some who escaped would perish. Others, a small group, would survive. God always preserves a remnant.

Graham Scroggie wrote the masterful book, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*. The liner note reads, "Get your front row seats now for the greatest drama ever - God's plan of salvation for humanity! Organized like a dramatic play, this classic traces the theme of redemption through each book of the Bible with careful scholarship and a thorough analysis of its content and history."

I love that, but I would ask, "Are we not the actors?"

We are on stage, not spectators. All of us take on many roles - sometimes concurrently. We read in the Bible about the roles of wives, husbands, children, masters, bond servants, pastors, teachers, evangelists, elders, deacons, missionaries.

Our dialog for each role is improvised. Whenever we speak, however, we are to speak as the oracles of God, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, using our words for building up, letting no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace into the hearers.¹

In movie credits you'll read, Personal Assistant to Christian Bale. If your life was credited like that, it would name your assistant God the Holy Spirit.

Get into your roles; On with the show, this is it.

#2 - You Have Direction To Follow In The Drama Of Redemption (v5-17)

In case you hadn't heard, James Earl Jones died this week at the age of 93. Before he was cast as the voice of Mufasa, Sean Connery was considered.

¹ First Peter 4:11 & Ephesians 4:29-30

“The name’s Mufasa; King Mufasa.”

The LORD ‘cast’ Israel in the role of revealing His righteousness to the surrounding nations. We read in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

There is something called, “Replacement Theology.” It is the belief that the Church has *replaced* Israel in God’s plan, and that the promises made to Israel in the Bible now apply to the Church.

To which we say, “WRONG!” Israel was and is perfectly cast by the Director.

Ezk 5:5 “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘This *is* Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her.

The model of the city being besieged; the Trager dung-cooker/smoker; a nearly starved Ezekiel - all of it was “Jerusalem.”

According to Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *“The term ‘in the midst’ in Hebrew means navel. Theologically, Jerusalem was considered by God to be the navel of the Earth. Jerusalem is the center while the other nations revolve around her. Her purpose, her calling, was to testify concerning the righteousness of God.”*

Ezk 5:6 She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that *are* all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes.’

This is God saying that He held Israel to a higher standard than He did Gentiles. Makes sense; they had His Law, they knew His heart.

So also we ought to adhere to the higher standard set by our Director. “ ‘AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ This *is* the first commandment. And the second, like *it, is* this: ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these' " (Mark 12:30-31).

Ezk 5:7 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Because you have multiplied *disobedience* more than the nations that *are* all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that *are* all around you' -

Ezk 5:8 therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Indeed I, even I, *am* against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.

It does seem, at times, that the LORD abandons Israel. The entire context of Scripture must be considered. When it is, we conclude along with the apostle Paul, "Has God cast away His people? *Certainly not!*... And so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:1 & 26).

Bob LaForge writes, "*It stands to reason that God would abandon us because of our constant sin, but if that was a reason for Him to leave us, **then there never was a reason for Him to have been drawn to us...** If He was attracted to us as enemies, how could He abandon those whom He now calls His children?"*

Ezk 5:9 And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations.

Ezk 5:10 Therefore fathers shall eat *their* sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds.

Cannibalism would ensue. When a nation rebels against God, and He gives them over to their carnal desires, does not that nation devour itself with excess?

Ezk 5:11 'Therefore, as I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish *you*; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity.

Have you had the experience of visiting someone you've not seen in a while, who is being treated for terminal cancer? It's hard not to be startled by their physical deterioration. They are **diminished**.

Ezk 5:12 One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

The commentators don't see the End Times in these verses. Ezekiel isn't looking that far ahead. The point here is to show what will happen to the current inhabitants of Jerusalem when it soon falls.

Ezk 5:13 'Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them.

Ezk 5:14 Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that *are* all around you, in the sight of all who pass by.

Ezk 5:15 'So it shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that *are* all around you, when I execute judgments among you in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I, the LORD, have spoken.

Ezk 5:16 When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and cut off your supply of bread.

Ezk 5:17 So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the LORD, have spoken.' "

When you saw famine, pestilence, "blood" (plague), and wild beasts all at once - you could be sure it was a judgment from God.

We may not think we play a significant role. Nevertheless, your role, my role, can be equally or more difficult than that of the Bible characters. If not physically, mentally and spiritually. It's why Hooper one-upped Quint when comparing scars. He pointed to his heart and said, "Mary Ellen Moffat. She broke my heart."

Regardless the degree of suffering, the same Holy Spirit that entered Ezekiel resides *permanently* in you to come alongside and comfort you.

Let's give an example. If you are married, you're in the biblical roles of husband & wife. Each day God says, "Roll camera... Action." He gives you direction in the Bible, and the enablement to follow His direction.

Is your household more Ozzie & Harriet... Or Ozzy Osbourne?

You are not looking to receive an Academy Award, or a Golden Globe, or a Peoples Choice Award. *You don't want to get a Razzi.* Rewards from men & women mean nothing, and can prove to be harmful.

You will receive rewards and a Lifetime Achievement Award for your faithfulness when you appear at the Judgment Seat of Jesus after we are resurrected & raptured.

Jerry Bridges reminds us, "The promises of the Bible are nothing more than God's covenant to be faithful to His people. **It is His character that makes these promises valid.**"