

# 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 12:1-28

Topic

Ezekiel packs his bags as a sign that Prince Zedekiah would seek to escape during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.

Title

***"All My Bags Are Packed, I'm Ready To Go"***

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### **Do you know your sign?**

You're probably thinking horoscope. A horoscope is an astrological forecast based on the position of celestial bodies at the time of your birth. It involves the twelve zodiac "signs," each representing specific birth periods throughout the year. Horoscopes are typically used for entertainment or self-reflection, although some people take them more seriously, believing they offer insights into character and destiny.

It's not harmless fun. It is a form of divination, of which God said. The Bible expressly forbids divination, sorcery, and hidden arts. We see it in our text, in verse twenty-four, where "false vision" and "flattering divination" are condemned.

**We aren't talking about the signs of the zodiac...We're talking about the sign of Ezekiel.**

"I have made you a **sign** to the house of Israel," the LORD said, and "Say, 'I *am* a **sign** to you" (v4&11).

Where do we fit in? One of the sources I consulted said, "the Church is intended to be a visible and spiritual **sign** that points others to God's character and redemptive purposes."

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 If You Are A Believer, You Are 'Signing' The Redemption Of The Lord, & #2 If You Are A Believer, You Are 'Signing' The Return Of The Lord.**

### **#1 - If You Are A Believer, 'Sign' The Redemption Of The Lord (v1-16)**

**American Sign Language imposters were unusually prevalent for a short time.**

- The Nelson Mandela Memorial Service in 2013.
- The Tampa Bay Police Department press conference in 2017.
- A Hurricane Irma press conference in 2017.

God's prophets are the real deal when it comes to signing. Ezekiel is perhaps the most well-known, but Jeremiah (and others) performed signs.

Biblical signs and symbols are one of my favorite things to talk about. Almost everyone gets it backwards. They think signs and symbols make the Bible more difficult to read and understand.

A great many believers balk at reading or teaching the Book of the Revelation. Too many signs & symbols, they say. Not true. The signs are all clearly defined, either in the book itself or elsewhere in the Bible.

Think of the purpose of signs in your daily life, e.g., traffic signs. Are they intended to confuse? *Of course not!* They clarify. And they are not subject to any independent interpretation.

**605BC...597BC...586BC.**

Those are the years in which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem. Ezekiel was taken to Babylon as a captive in the second invasion. He was chosen by the LORD to be His prophet to the exiles who were already there, and to those who would come there.

A tiny bit of history is needful at this point. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah as ruler over Jerusalem. He was not the rightful king, and that's why he is called a "prince" in verses 10&12.

Ezk 12:1 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

Ezk 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.

Another day, another rejection of the Word of God and its messenger.

Have you ever considered how many of God's prophets were unsuccessful by human standards?

⇒ All you need to know about Jeremiah is that he was called "the weeping prophet."

⇒ Isaiah was told his audience would refuse to receive the Word.

⇒ In his defense before the first century rulers of the Jews, the martyr, Stephen, would say to them, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers..." (Acts 7:52).

The LORD encouraged Ezekiel when He twice says the Jews are "a rebellious house." Ezekiel was faithful to obey the LORD.

As a servant, the Lord looks for you to be faithful. You are *accountable*, but not *responsible*.

Ezk 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.

The LORD was showing them what was about to happen. Nevertheless, *it was not too late to repent!* Ezekiel's two-act, day/night drama might yet penetrate the rebellious hearts of the Jerusalem Jews.

We all have biases. *That's not always bad.* Ours is to believe that God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (First Peter 3:9). Your understanding of the character of God influences how you approach and interpret His Word.

Ezk 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.

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

Ezk 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 **[We would say that he left "under cover of darkness"]** for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel."

Jason Bourne frequently relies on his Go-bag, stashed with passports, cash, weapons, and supplies, as he is constantly on the run and needs to be ready to bug-out at a moment's notice. Ezekiel 'signs' to the Jews a man bugging-out with his go-bag.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 12:8 And in the morning the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 12:9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'

I wonder: Did these guys even try to understand the "sign"? I don't think so. They probably wanted Ezekiel to simply tell them what the LORD said. Thing is, though, they consistently rejected God's Word, or twisted it. Signs were the way to go.

Ezk 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." '

As I said, Zedekiah was not the rightful king of Judah. Ezekiel called him "prince."

Ezk 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.'

Ezk 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.

This story is told in Jeremiah and in Second Kings. All accounts agree.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

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

"I will spread **My** net... **My** snare... **I** will scatter them." Babylon would accomplish these things. The LORD was behind them, using them, to discipline His rebellious nation.

Don't get upset about God using the godless to discipline His people. Being disciplined by God is a show of His affection.

"Yes, Gene, I get that. But their punishment was so harsh!" Was it though? What is a proper punishment for a nation that encouraged burning infant children on the molten-hot arms of an idol of Molech?

If Zedekiah was taken to Babylon, why didn't he "see" it? Second Kings tells us why: "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" (25:7).

The LORD continued to bless and use the remnant of believers. You might recall that Nebuchadnezzar - who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace - saw a fourth Person. *It was Jesus*. Later Nebuchadnezzar was saved. He wrote a Gospel tract that was widely circulated.

Ezk 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."

Do we not look upon the history of the dispersed Jews with wonder? In their discipline unbelievers see that there is a God Who loves them. Napoleon Bonaparte noted, "The existence of the Jews is proof of the existence of God."

God's plan is to redeem the Jews:

- Israel became a nation again.
- In the future they will enjoy a time of protection from the antichrist.
- Exactly half-way through the seven year Time of Jacob's Trouble, the antichrist will launch the greatest persecution of Jews ever.
- Jews will be holed-up in Petra.

- They will finally call upon Jesus.
- He will save them, physically.
- The remnant that has survived will all be saved spiritually.
- The one-thousand year Kingdom of God on earth will begin.

A long time ago in a title insurance company far, far away, my bosses asked me to be involved in a pretty big lie. It was worse than that; it was illegal. The Lord gave me the strength to say "I'm a Christian and I can't do it." I give Him all the glory for it. I kept trying to justify it. At that time in my life, that was a way to 'sign' what God's redemption meant to me.

If we believe that the Lord is guiding our path, and that we are on it, then we need to talk to Him about our 'sign' where He has led us.

## **#2 - If You Are A Believer, 'Sign' The Return Of The Lord (v17-25)**

Eschatology is the branch of theology that deals with the study of the last things. It's almost always the last chapters in theology books. The apostle Paul taught it first in Thessalonica. Likewise the apostle Peter in his letters. Eschatology isn't a curiosity, but a necessity.

Ezk 12:17 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 12:18 "Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety.

Ezk 12:19 And say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the inhabitants of Jerusalem *and* to the land of Israel: "They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with dread, so that her land may be emptied of all who are in it, because of the violence of all those who dwell in it.

Ezk 12:20 Then the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall become desolate; and you shall know that I *am* the LORD." ' ' "

Small Jewish cities lined the way to Jerusalem. These would be the first conquered.

They would "know" because it would be the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Ezk 12:21 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 12:22 "Son of man, what *is* this proverb *that* you *people* have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails'?

Ezk 12:23 Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel." But say to them, "The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision.

This is an OT way of saying, "Scoffers will come in the last days... saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation." But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."<sup>1</sup>

Ezk 12:24 For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.

Ezk 12:25 For I *am* the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord GOD.' "

Any seeming delays do not nullify God's plans. He's waiting; His longsuffering waits.

Ezk 12:26 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 12:27 "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees *is* for many days *from now*, and he prophesies of times far off.'

Ezk 12:28 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord GOD.' "

Do you have a go-bag? It's tough to limit it to bare necessities.

Do we have only the bare necessities and are we ready to go to another place? For us, it is not a departure to go into exile, but to the Father's house.

Maybe then people will ask us why we live the way we do. Then we can point them to the wrath of God that is coming upon the world, and to the Savior Who can and wants to save from it. We can sign the hope that is in us.

⇒ Signing the return of Jesus can be as casual as you coming to Church Sunday & Wednesdays. Your neighbors see you going & coming while they mow their lawns. They've probably been to churches that turned them off... or had a bad experience... But there you are, excited to meet with the Lord & His peeps.

⇒ Signing the return of Jesus can be more formal. Right after I got saved, I made an appointment with my philosophy prof to share the Lord with him.

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<sup>1</sup> First Peter 3

We can't tell you how to apply this in your life. The Lord can, and He will if you talk to Him about it.