

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 14:1-11

Topic

The LORD deems His judgments upon Judah as attempts to “seize them by their heart,” to lead them to “*Repent!*”

Title

“Please Seize Me, O Lord, So I’ll Please You”

Action movies typically end with fighting on at least two fronts.

- Aragorn led his force to the Gates of Mordor to distract the gaze of the Dark Lord, Sauron. Meanwhile Sam and Frodo were at Mount Doom to destroy the One ring.
- Luke Skywalker faced Darth Vader and the Emperor on the second Death Star. Han, Leia, and Chewbacca were on the forest moon of Endor fighting Imperial forces.

It’s not unusual for one of the fronts to involve the supernatural. Ron Howard’s *Willow* ends that way, as does Kevin Costner’s *Robin Hood*. Both feature witches who must be overcome.

Christians are all too familiar with dual warfare.

We are at war in the material world, always with a supernatural component. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the believers in Ephesus, wrote, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (6:12).

Something we rarely consider: What if my battle is **with** the Lord? If I pressed you for a biblical example, it wouldn't take you long to say Jonah or Jacob.

The 6th century Jewish captives in Babylon were fighting a losing battle **with** the Lord. They're idolatry and rebellion had just about exhausted the LORD's longsuffering. The final blow against Jerusalem and its Temple was about to land.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The Lord Besieges You**, and **#2 The Lord Beseeches You**.

#1 - The Lord Besieges You (v1-3)

The LORD considered the Jews of Judah to be "estranged" from Him. He loves the Jews as a husband loves his wife. He pressured them in attempts to lead them to "Repent!"

The fall of the ten tribes in the north to Assyria in 720BC; the three Babylonian sieges of Jerusalem; the destruction of the town and the Temple; the 70yr captivity in Babylon. These were how God applied pressure.

Ezk 14:1 Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me.

Ezekiel previously mentioned 70 Elders. They were lay leaders to the exiles. The priests, the false prophets, and the Elders comprised the leadership. As the Elders began to hear rumors about the fall of Jerusalem, "some" sought out God's true prophet.

At some point a person wants answers to life's most important questions. Or at least the questions that are most important to them. We have the answer to all of them. Peace with God, and good will toward men, is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Dan Stone wrote, "We are programming for failure if we're looking for ultimate answers in a non-ultimate realm, a realm that's partial, fragmented, incomplete. We end up worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. We can do that as believers. The total answer is a Person, Jesus Christ. **It's part of God's program to make us dissatisfied with what the temporal realm offers, so that we might seek life in Him.**"

Ezekiel ministered out of his home. His audiences were never very large. The LORD measures impact differently than we do.

Ezk 14:2 And the word of the LORD came to me...

It would be interesting to know how long they waited on the LORD, and what they did until He began speaking to Ezekiel.

Ezk 14:3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?"

A quick reminder: Idolatry is when you believe that Jesus is insufficient for your joy and satisfaction. You decide that *someone* or *something* else will satisfy you.

You've undoubtedly heard the phrase, "If you have your health, you have everything." That's patently false. Even if you are never sick a day in your life - you are going to die.

I once heard a testimony from a dying man. He said, "I would rather have AIDS and know Jesus, than *not* have AIDS and *not* know Jesus."

It is essential to be future-focused in order to not covet and thereby set up your material idols.

At first the LORD spoke only to Ezekiel. He invited His prophet's opinion. Should He entertain their seeking? Or was their sin so gross that the LORD was abandoning them?

Their sins were heinous. Nevertheless the LORD commands them to "*Repent!*"... that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be My people and I may be their God," says the Lord GOD' " (v6,11).

Seeker friendly, seeker sensitive, are descriptions of pulpits that water down sin & the need for salvation in order to attract people. We should *never* dilute the Gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation.

There is a sense in which we *should* be seeker sensitive, seeker friendly. Since God reaches out to the most odious of sinners, we must be ready to be witnesses of His love & grace.

Who would be unwelcome by us, or turned away by us, because we are disgusted by their particular sin?

I'm not suggesting we ignore potentially harmful situations. We have policies in place to ensure the safety of our congregation and visitors. Especially our kids. That's wisdom, not prejudice.

Let's look upon unsaved sinners the way Jesus does. He's knocking at their door, seeking them, doing all He can to capture their hearts for eternity.

When we are being besieged, we need to rule-out that our battle is **with** the Lord.

- Are we running from His will, like Jonah attempted? Prepare to be swallowed.
- Are we wrestling against His will, like Jacob did? He will give us a life-long limp.

I don't want you to get into a spiritual fog, wondering if you are battling the Lord. It will be obvious. You'll be in outward sin, a hypocrite, lying to others.

- You'll be like Ananias & Saphira who, for the sake of receiving praise, lied to the believers and to God the Holy Spirit about the amount of money they were donating. **God killed them.**
- God killed believers in Corinth who were drunk, disorderly, and hoarding their food from the poor when the church gathered for the love feast prior to sharing in communion each Sunday evening.

The Lord loves you so much that He reserves the right to kill you and bring you home to Heaven ahead of schedule.

⇒ You can't win **any** battle with, i.e., *against*, the Lord.

⇒ You can win **every** battle with, i.e., *aligned with*, the Lord.

#2 - The Lord Beseeches You (v4-11)

- One commentator titles this section, "The condemnation of those who are set on idolatry."
- Another calls it, "The certain judgment of the offenders."

We agree - but keep in mind the Lord was beseeching them to "*Repent!*"

We explain repenting as turning to God *from* idols. One description of it says, "Repentance is not merely regret or remorse but a decisive change in mind and heart

that results in a change in behavior. It is both a one-time act in salvation and an ongoing attitude in the Christian life.”

Christians can be reluctant to *believe* or *receive* that a person is truly repentant. We want to see the fruits of repentance. Jesus told us that if someone sinned against us 490 times in a day, we should forgive them. Jesus wasn’t establishing a limit of 490. He was employing hyperbole. But if we used that number, and assumed being awake 16hrs, we would sin against the person just short of 50 times *each waking hour*. Not much time to see any fruit. In fact, it would show the opposite. *We need discernment.*

Ezk 14:4 “Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, Ezk 14:5 that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.” ’

The predicament that the Jerusalem Jews were in could **only** be resolved by the action of the LORD prophesying for centuries and then following through with material destruction and physical captivity. If there were any other way, God would have done it.

In your life, as God conforms you into the image of Jesus, there is no other way but the way He has set before you.

Jeremiah Burroughs wrote, “Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.”

Dr. Francis Wells, a renowned heart surgeon, said, “*There is something profoundly moving about holding a human heart in your hands. It is not just a pump; it is the essence of life, the rhythm of existence. It is a privilege and a wonder to work on something so fragile yet so resilient.*”

God does more than “hold” a heart. He *seizes* it. The verb translated as “seize” is not a gentle one. It suggests that God will grab onto His people in order to pull them away from their idols.

Think the illustration through. God suddenly pierces your chest and seizes your beating heart. If that were to actually happen, you would freeze in place. He would have your heart, but you would be all ears.

Maybe you've had the experience of having to grip a toddler tightly as they race into traffic. God seizes your heart, or tries to, when He sees you headed for the broad way that leads to destruction.

It *can* have a physical component, both for unbelievers & believers. I have a very present memory of the Lord seizing my heart when I got saved. I knew that was dead inside, and yet I was alive and going to be struck dead. It was the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Ezk 14:6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.

God does not command you, not ever, to do what you cannot do.

- If you are not a believer, you **can** "Repent!" as the one-time act of salvation.
- If you are a believer, you **can** "Repent!" over-and-over again as the on-going attitude of your life in Christ.

If you can trust God to save you for eternity, you can trust Him to lead you for a lifetime.

Ezk 14:7 For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the LORD will answer him by Myself.

Ezk 14:8 I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Think of any of the many Christian leaders who have fallen. Their fall becomes a warning "sign" and a modern-day "proverb."

Ezk 14:9 "And if the prophet [**the false prophet**] is induced to speak anything, I the LORD have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel.

God doesn't lie, or tell anyone to lie. There is a story in First Kings¹ that explains how this kind of thing occurs. The LORD had determined that wicked King Ahab should be killed. *We have no problem with that!*

"And the LORD said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will persuade him.' The LORD said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the LORD said, 'You shall persuade *him*, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you."

Who is God talking to? The Scripture definitely teaches that there are many supernatural beings and creatures in Heaven. It strikes us as odd that not all of them are good. Satan appears in Heaven, for example, in the Book of Job. The indication is that he and other malevolent, fallen beings are there often.

In more than a few passages there seems to be a Divine Council of supernaturals to whom God speaks. They've been given, by God, a measure of delegated authority to act upon the earth, and especially upon the human race. Such a meeting was taking place in the passage I just read. God asks for suggestions and something intelligent called "a spirit" says he can encourage the lying prophets to keep on lying. The LORD signs-off on it.

Currently the devil is the God of this world. Thank you, Adam & Eve. He is described as "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). I lie... You lie... the world is full of lies and deceit. God, Who cannot lie, permits lying on a massive scale in the current fallen condition of our world. He permits sin on a massive scale. He has a plan to overcome sin, and He is working it out.

God didn't lie to King Ahab. You can't say He made the spirit lie. If you want to accuse God of something, it would be that He allows free will. But, of course, we enjoy free will, do we not?

Ezk 14:10 And they shall bear their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired,

¹ First Kings 22:20-23

Ezk 14:11 that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be My people and I may be their God," says the Lord GOD.' "

When we hear the term "search and seizure," we think of the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution. It protects us from authorities conducting illegal searches and seizures.

Jesus searches our hearts...Jesus seizes our hearts.

For our own good, and for his glory, He is always conducting searches of our hearts, then using His considerable resources to seize our heart so that we might be drawn back to His love and grace.