

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 14:12-23

Topic

Not even a prayer team of Noah, Daniel & Job could stop God's judgment on idolatrous Judah

Title

"We Three Saints Of Righteousness Are"

I woke up to the distant, rhythmic pounding of battering rams. It never stopped. My stomach cramped from hunger. It had been days since I'd eaten more than scraps of stale bread. Potable water was scarce. Most of the population had been drinking from puddles of who knows what.

I stepped outside. Emaciated citizens lined the streets. Is that how I looked? Rotting corpses lay all around, too many to bury. Dogs, no longer pets, prowled in packs, gnawing at edible flesh of the dead or of those yet alive too weak to resist. Rumors persisted of other wild beasts feeding in the night, though I (thankfully) had not seen or heard any.

I moved slowly, deliberately, in an attempt to remain unseen. People had grown desperate, assaulting one another. I turned down a narrow alley to avoid an altercation. Two men were struggling over a withered vegetable. The younger man struck the older with a stone, leaving him bleeding in the dirt. I don't believe he saw me. I kept walking.

I passed by a doorway. Two women were attempting to ignite a fire using excrement as fuel. A butchering knife lay on the stoop, and a few bowls. As I approached I could

see an infant's lifeless body, his open eyes staring up at the sky, his cheeks sunken, his tiny body wasted away. I vomited on myself as I continued walking.

The Temple came into view. Firebombs had scarred its walls. Priests no longer sang or made sacrifices there. Months ago we ran out of animals to offer.

I climbed a crumbling staircase to the top of the wall and looked out. Well equipped and well fed soldiers stationed around the city ensured no one could escape. There was a sense they were anxious to begin pillaging.

On the 9th day of the 4th month, in Zedekiah's 11th year, the Babylonians finally breached the walls. Soldiers surged into the city. A long siege was always frustrating. They would take it out on people and property.

The city was aflame. Thick smoke choked the air, and the unmistakable stench of burning flesh.

I ran, stumbling. Not to flee the city, for that was impossible, but to return to my family. Together we might have dignity at the very end.



The account of the ruin of Jerusalem is fictional but accurate. The prophet Jeremiah would write a lamentation, saying things like, *"The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people. The LORD has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, And it has devoured its foundations"* (Lamentations 4:10-11).

The judgment against Judah was *imminent* and *inevitable*. There would be no changing God's mind. The time for national repentance was past.

Individual repentance was still possible.

The Church is nowhere to be found in this passage. In the 6th century BC, the Church remained a mystery to be revealed in the 1st century AD.

Does that mean we're done?! **No.** There *are* gracious gleanings to collect for our spiritual nourishment & encouragement.

Of the many possible themes we might explore in our study, the one I believe Jesus has for us, is *righteousness*. The righteousness of three OT saints is highlighted.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 **Noah, Daniel, Job... And YOU Have Been Declared Righteous**, and #2 **Noah, Daniel, Job... And YOU Are To Display Righteousness**.

#1 Noah, Daniel, Job... And YOU Have Been Declared Righteous (v12-21)

► In the days of **Noah** God destroyed the world by water in a global flooding. Estimates are hard, but somewhere between several million or a billion perished. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. [He] was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God."

The few righteous were kept safe in the Ark while the unrighteous were destroyed. The 6th century Jews thought of Jerusalem as a kind of Ark. they did not believe that the LORD would sink them.

► **Daniel** had been taken captive to Babylon in 605BC. The final siege would come in 586BC. During those nine years Daniel likely completed his Babylonian education, gained influence in the royal court, and interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

What could be better than having a righteous Jew in a high government position to stem the tide of any further hostility? A century later that exact scenario would play out. When Queen Esther revealed she was Jewish, it saved the Jews from a holocaust.

Daniel wasn't raised up for such a time as that. For all his position he was powerless to help.

► Job. It had to be Job. "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" (1:8). You know the rest. The righteous suffer. Bad things do happen to good people, and to God's people.

But after a few months, Job was restored. Surely what ever God would permit, is was not going to last long. Wrong.

We have presuppositions about God that are not derived from the Word. It is why we *do* think it strange when we fall into various trials.

Ezk 14:12 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying:

I wish these guys had explained exactly how the Word of the LORD came to them. We know there was a School of the Prophets established by Samuel around 1050BC. You would think lesson #1 is "How do I hear from God?" *I want that syllabus!*

Ezk 14:13 "Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it.

I was hoping we could look at this as a universal principal governing all "lands." The LORD says "When a **land** sins against me." But the LORD outlines four specific judgments He would employ upon **THE** land, the land of Israel. This is specific to them.

Speaking of Israel, her existence as a modern nation in her ancient homeland is both a miracle and a fulfillment of many prophecies. If you're among those who believe that God has transferred to the church His unconditional promises made to Israel, you need to change your mind. Amos 9:5 reads, "I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled up From the land I have given them."

Ezk 14:14 Even *if* these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord GOD.

We should talk about righteousness more often. It's a word that has lost its impact from common use. I can't help it, but I always think of Crush the sea turtle and him saying, "*Righteous*" to describe something gnarly. It is gnarly - but in a much more awesome way.

In its biblical use, righteousness is the condition of being morally right or justifiable, especially in God's eyes.

Abraham wasn't in this trio, but it is from him we learn that when a person believes God, "it is accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3). You believe and you are declared righteous.

Martin Luther illustrates this in a story he called *The Great Exchange*.

Imagine a beggar standing before a king. The beggar is dressed in rags, covered in filth, and has nothing of value to offer. The king is clothed in the finest royal robes, full of glory and splendor.

Now picture this:

- The king takes off his royal robe and places it on the beggar.
- At the same time, the king takes the filthy rags of the beggar and wears them himself.

You don't need commentary to understand what happened. In this exchange, the beggar gains the king's wealth, honor, and status, while the king bears the beggar's poverty and shame. The beggar did nothing to deserve this; he only received it as a gift.

- Through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, our sin is accounted to Him (He wears our "filthy rags").
- In turn, the Lord's righteousness is imputed to us (we are clothed in His "royal robe").

There is only one way to be saved. It is to believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ. OT saints were never 'saved' by the rites, rules, rituals, and overall religion of the Law of Moses. The Law was intended to show you your need of God's free gift. Then the Law shows you how to live a righteous life.

Ezk 14:15 "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts,

It's a little hard for us to relate to animal attacks.

Planning a trip to Bali? The Bartering Monkeys of Bali are living the thug life. They steal things from tourists and then barter them back for food.

In New Delhi, in 2007, many government buildings, temples and residential neighborhoods were overrun by Rhesus macaques. Deputy Mayor S.S. Bajwa was rushed to a hospital after being attacked by a gang of them. He died from head injuries sustained falling from his balcony during the assault.

Ezk 14:16 *even though* these three men *were* in it, *as I live,*" says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate.

Ezk 14:17 *"Or if I* bring a sword on that land, and say, 'Sword, go through the land,' and I cut off man and beast from it,

Ezk 14:18 *even though* these three men *were* in it, *as I live,*" says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves would be delivered.

Ezk 14:19 *"Or if I* send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast,

Ezk 14:20 *even though* Noah, Daniel, and Job *were* in it, *as I live,*" says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness."

Can you imagine going to a prayer meeting and finding Noah, Daniel, and Job there? Nevertheless no gathering of godly saints could change what was going to happen. Not this time.

Ezk 14:21 For thus says the Lord GOD: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem - the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence - to cut off man and beast from it?"

This was the unique 4-stage plan. The priests, false prophets, and Elders were bent on immorality and idolatry that exceeded that of their pagan neighbors. Like Ol' Yeller, they had the slobberin' fits and needed to be put down. For His part, the LORD was the best dog-gone God in the world. His providence would keep the plan of redemption on track. The Messiah would come through Israel, right on time.

I believe I confessed to you some time back that I once binge-watched the six-part *Pride & Prejudice*. Lady Catherine bemoans Elizabeth Bennet's low station, and insists she must not marry Darcy. Elizabeth responds, "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."

Listen attentively: Everyone who believes is equally righteous.

This helps us understand the apostle Peter telling us that Abraham's nephew, Lot, is "righteous." He was declared righteous; he was a believer.

You are just as righteous as every other saint in either Testament.

#2 Noah, Daniel, Job... And YOU Are To Display Righteousness (v22&23)

Why these three guys? What more do they communicate than righteousness?

They encourage us to be overcomers of the world, the flesh, and the devil:

- Noah overcame the world - in a big way!
- Job overcame the devil.
- Can we say that Daniel overcame the flesh? I think so. The very first episode in his book involves him refusing to eat or drink "the king's delicacies."

These guys were declared righteous and then they were put on display by God as examples and models. "Consider My servant Job... or Noah... or Daniel... or **YOU**."

Ezk 14:22 Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, *both* sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, all that I have brought upon it.

Ezk 14:23 And they will comfort you, when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it," says the Lord GOD.

The "remnant" in this case is not the godly remnant that is always preserved in history by the powerful providence of God. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says,

Those who questioned the severity of God's judgment would recognize its justice when they observed the evil character of the captives [the remnant] brought from Jerusalem. They would be forced to admit that these people did deserve to be punished and that God was not unjust.

The gem for us to discover and discuss is, "you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it," says the Lord GOD."

"God does nothing without cause" makes a great opening line if you are seeking to encourage a believer. It establishes the foundation upon which they can display righteousness.

Your circumstances, your situation, is "not without cause" as the Lord who has begun His work in you brings it to completion.

Do you have display cases at home? They are usually deep with several items in them. Your life with Jesus can be understood as a series of display cases, or maybe one huge one. Jesus has chosen the perfect case. Working together, you & Jesus are to discover the good works He wants to display.

Some of you produce amazing crafts. Or maybe you are a builder. What if you had every possible tool, and access to all the finest materials? Would you utilize them?

In the opening verses of his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul writes, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ..." He elaborates, saying you are chosen, predestined, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, lavished with grace, given insight into God's will, promised an inheritance, given hope, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and assured of your eternal future. That list is not exhaustive.

The apostle Peter said the same thing: "His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust (Second Peter 1:3-4).

Every spiritual blessing...all things...You who are righteous can don't all things through Jesus.