

# 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 19:1-14

Topic

*Two of Judah's last kings are the subjects of a lament for their having ruled inappropriately.*

Title

***"The Kings Of The Bungle"***

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**What is the one song you just can't stand... besides It's a Small World? Wind Beneath My Wings.**

I wouldn't dislike it so much if I hadn't heard so many well-meaning but awful renditions of it at funerals I've officiated. It consistently ranks among the most popular funeral songs.

I'm showing my age by using the word "funeral." Families now prefer "Celebration of Life."

If we want services to sound more uplifting, maybe we should revive the Latin term from the Middle Ages: *fūnerālia*.

**Funeral songs are prominent in our text today.**

Two "lamentations" are on the LORD's playlist. The CEV translates v14, "This funeral song must be sung with sorrow."

1. The first introduces us to a couple of ferocious lions. Their extreme behavior makes it necessary to trap & eliminate them.

2. The second depicts a vine that is incredibly fruitful... until it isn't. It is violently uprooted.

A lioness raises her cub to be a ferocious predator. Egyptian hunters trap him. The lioness raises another cub, more ferocious than the first. He also is captured, but this time it is at the hands of hunters hired by Babylonian.

A full and fruitful grape vine is planted by a stream. It towers above even the tallest trees. From its branches royal scepters for the king are made. Suddenly, but not without warning, it is uprooted and burned.

The lion, the vine, and the scepter are common emblems for Israel:

- The lioness is Israel.
- The two ferocious cubs are two of Judah's last kings.
  
- The vine is Israel.
- God uproots her and puts her in Babylon.

I'll organize my comments around two questions: **#1 Is The Lord Lamenting Your Portrayal Of The Lion?**, and **#2 Is The Lord Lamenting Your Lack of Fruit On The Vine?**

### **#1 Is The Lord Lamenting Your Portrayal Of The Lion? (v1-9)**

**A lamentation is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow directed toward God. What is it when God is the one lamenting?**

Throughout the Book of Ezekiel, we've see that the LORD is deeply emotional, allowing the actions of His people to impact His feelings.

Scholars argue about the extent of God's emotions. The Doctrine of Impassibility asserts that God does not experience emotional changes or suffering due to external events or actions of His creation. It emphasizes God's unchanging nature and His transcendence over creation.

John Owen in describing impassibility once said, "It is agreed upon by all the orthodox." Until the 19th century, almost all Christian theologians believed that God is impassible.

Opponents of impassability point out that the Bible portrays God as experiencing emotions, such as anger, pleading, laughter, and, in the incarnation, even weeping. In many ways, God wears His heart on His sleeve.

I like what one commentator said, "God is impassible but not unemotional."

The Bible definitely portrays God as experiencing a range of emotions, such as love, hate, jealousy, joy, grief, laughter, and compassion. Since His emotions are holy and pure, He must feel to a greater extent than we do.

Have you had to put down a loved pet? Think of God having to "put down" these two ferocious lions.

Our relationship with Jesus is intimate and dynamic. He is Judge, but He is also our Father. Our actions can definitely impact Him. Otherwise, why pray?

Impassibility means we cannot fully grasp God's feelings, but our actions do affect Him. Do you obey God out of fear of judgment or love for Him, leading to obedience to His Law?

### **Ezk 19:1 "Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel,**

We often say, "God is on the throne," and He is - as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and ruler over all nations. However, the specific throne of David in Jerusalem remains unoccupied. The world awaits the true heir, who will one day take His rightful place as "The Lion of the Tribe of Judah."

- Jacob, the patriarch of Israel, fathered twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes. In Genesis 49, he bestowed leadership upon Judah, likening him to a lion and prophesying that a ruler would emerge from his line. Hebrews 1:8 states, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom."
- The Bible leaves no doubt as to the identity of the Lion. In Revelation 5:5, Jesus is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David."

Judah would fall in 586BC, just a few years after Ezekiel delivered these laments. God sang them some two years prior to the fall of the city. They simultaneously signaled the inevitability of the captivity, but also the possibility of repentance.

**Singing the laments before they were conquered gave hope.**

The prophets and the godly remnant of Jews knew the times. In the days of David, we are told that the tribe descended from Issachar "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (First Chronicles 12:32).

Understanding the times is more than knowing we are in the Last Days excitedly awaiting the coming of the Lord to resurrect & rapture us.

Understanding the times is knowing what God is doing to further the redemption of humans & the restoration of His creation. It is knowing how we ought to live.

A marvelous way to know how to live in the Church Age is to read about the apostle Paul. He said we should imitate him the way he imitated Jesus" (First Corinthians 11:1).

Paul famously said, "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (Second Corinthians 12:9-10).

When it was midnight in his life, he sang.

**Remember people saying "Party like it's 1999?" We should "Praise like He's coming for us is today."**

These are parables that the Lord has set to the music of "lamentation." "Princes of Israel" means kings in their succession.

**Ezk 19:2 and say: 'What is your mother? A lioness: She lay down among the lions; Among the young lions she nourished her cubs.**

Theologian C.H. Dodd is attributed with saying, "Don't make a parable walk on all fours." We shouldn't try to assign meaning to every detail. Some details are necessary simply to further the story and nothing else. You are looking for the one, main lesson.

**Ezk 19:3 She brought up one of her cubs, And he became a young lion; He learned to catch prey, And he devoured men.**

**Ezk 19:4 The nations also heard of him; He was trapped in their pit, And they brought him with chains to the land of Egypt.**

Historically, Jehoahaz was the king deposed by Pharaoh Neco II, who "led him with hooks" - likely literal hooks through his nose or jaw attached to a rope - and took him to Egypt, where he died in captivity.

**Ezk 19:5 'When she saw that she waited, that her hope was lost, She took another of her cubs and made him a young lion.**

**Ezk 19:6 He roved among the lions, And became a young lion; He learned to catch prey; He devoured men.**

**Ezk 19:7 He knew their desolate places, And laid waste their cities; The land with its fullness was desolated By the noise of his roaring.**

**Ezk 19:8 Then the nations set against him from the provinces on every side, And spread their net over him; He was trapped in their pit.**

**Ezk 19:9 They put him in a cage with chains, And brought him to the king of Babylon; They brought him in nets, That his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.**

Jehoiachin was the king deposed by Nebuchadnezzar. Mercenaries caught & caged him. He was released after 37 years in prison.

Jehoahaz & Jehoiachin were The Ghost & the Darkness of Judah. That's the title of the film based on the true story of two man-eating lions in Tsavo Africa. They terrorized workers during the building of the Kenya-Uganda Railway in 1898. They killed at least 35 men, maybe over 100, until hunted and killed by Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson, a British engineer and soldier.

Both lions of Judah violently "devoured men." No matter exactly what "devoured" means, that description is not fit for a King of Judah portraying the future, final lion of the tribe of Judah, Jesus Christ. We are not imitating Jesus if we can be described using such words.

For some time now there has been a hipster attempt to call believers "Christ-followers" in favor of "Christians." Both are accurate. I like Christian for at least two reasons:

1. First, it is biblical. "Christian" appears in Acts 11:26 & 26:28, and First Peter 4:16. In Acts it reads, "and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." I ran into something I need to research further. There are scholars who translate "called" as "divinely called." In other words, God revealed to them they ought to be called Christians.

2. Second, I like "Christian" because it means "like Christ." It reminds me that my life is a portrayal of Jesus. I am following Him, but that's only one aspect of imitating Him.

Mariano Rivera, the legendary New York Yankees closer, famously entered games to Metallica's Enter Sandman. He didn't choose the song. It was chosen by those who watched him.

People watch us. What song would they associate with me? With you?

In Zephaniah 3:17 we read, "The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

What song is the Lord singing over you?

#2 Is The Lord Lamenting Your Lack Of Fruit On The Vine? (v10-14)

### **The Bible is the best commentary on the Bible.**

The parable-lamentation of the vine in Ezekiel nineteen finds its best in-depth commentary in Psalms 80:8-19.

*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River. Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it. Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, And the branch that You made strong for Yourself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!*

Israel's national history is depicted as a vine transplanted from Egypt to the Promised Land. Due to persistent unbelief, they became a fruitless vine. Nevertheless, God promised restoration and salvation for Israel.

In his commentary, John Gill wrote, *"Lamentable was the case of the Jews already, but it would be still more so when all that was foretold of them should be accomplished. It denotes the continuance of the sad estate of that people; and perhaps may refer to their present condition, which will continue till they are turned to the Lord."*

**Ezk 19:10 'Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline, Planted by the waters, Fruitful and full of branches Because of many waters.**

**Ezk 19:11 She had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick branches, And was seen in her height amid the dense foliage.**

The "scepter" that the Lord carries is also called a "rod."

- If you are talking about a shepherd, you called it a rod.
- If you're talking about the king, you call it His scepter.

**Jesus is our Shepherd-King.**

**Ezk 19:12 But she was plucked up in fury, She was cast down to the ground, And the east wind dried her fruit. Her strong branches were broken and withered; The fire consumed them.**

**Ezk 19:13 And now she is planted in the wilderness, In a dry and thirsty land [Babylon was lush; this describes them spiritually]**

**Ezk 19:14 Fire has come out from a rod of her branches And devoured her fruit, So that she has no strong branch - a scepter for ruling.' "This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.**

God sang this "lament" before the final siege of Jerusalem. It then became their lamentation when conquered.

**The Lord was making funeral plans for Judah These were the songs He had written for them.**

In the Lion Lament, the lioness is described, "She lay down among the lions; Among the young lions she nourished her cubs." It suggests a familiarity with other lions. She wanted to be among them and excel them in their wickedness. There was no separation from them. She thus became like them.

God's people once asked Him for a king to rule over them. The reason they gave was that they wished to be like the other nations. They didn't understand that they were chosen to be separate to show the nations the glory of God.

Christians can be too attracted to ideas and principles that have their origins not in the Bible. We want to be like others, like unbelievers. "In the world, but not of the world" - there is no better way to put the measurement of our separation.

We close with this Tozer quote. *"The Christian is called to separation from the world, but we must be sure we know what we mean (or more important, what God means) by the world. We are likely to make it mean something external only and thus miss its real meaning."*