

The Lying Prophet

Ezekiel was given command by God to portray the fate of Jerusalem by lying on his side and cutting his hair. But what did it all mean? How accurate were the pictures and to what were they referring?

Literal or Symbolic

People who read the Bible are often led astray by assuming that most prophecy is symbolic, thus leaving said scriptures to be interpreted in obscure and misleading ways. Almost all prophetic passages that have been fulfilled up to this point have been fulfilled literally. I say *almost* because there are times when God directs us to look at things in a symbolic manner. When God goes out of His way to point out the use of symbols, we will be on stable ground to approach it as such. Such a declaration is found with the prophet Ezekiel and an unusual tableau. After God presents the script Ezekiel is to follow, God made it clear that a scene in act one has to do with Israel¹ and that a scene in act two has to do with Jerusalem². With that in mind, let us examine this unusual play.

Act I scene I - The First Storyboard

Complicated movies require the use of storyboards or a series of drawings that lay out the plot. God commands Ezekiel to do the same by sitting in the main thoroughfare of Jerusalem and draw the coming siege of Jerusalem.

“You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem. Lay siege against it, build a siege wall against it, and heap up a mound against it; set camps against it also, and place battering rams against it all around. Moreover take for yourself an iron plate, and set it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.”
- Ezekiel 4:1

The prophet was told to draw the scene on a soft clay tablet. Since clay represents frail man, God was trying to show their vulnerability to the nation Babylon that was coming to lay siege over them. And just as is recorded by Josephus³, Ezekiel was to illustrate that Babylon will come using camps, battering rams and other such machines.

Ezekiel was then directed to place an iron plate between him and the clay tablet. Iron, in contrast to the clay, was very strong. This may represent the refusal of the people to believe the word of Ezekiel, but in this, I am not sure.

¹ Ezekiel 4:4

² Ezekiel 5:5

³ Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews, book X, chapter VII

Act I scene 2 - Lying on the Job

You have to imagine Ezekiel sitting in the middle of the busy market thoroughfare of Jerusalem acting out these vivid pictures. But only until today could we understand the event that the prophet was to act out next.

“Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. *I have laid on you a day for each year.*” - Ezekiel 4:4-6

It is very important to note that what Ezekiel was to act out through lying on his side, was to be timed in the scale of 1 day = 1 year. The prophet was directed by God to lay on his left side for 390 days, representing 390 years. He was then to lie on his right side for another 40 days, which represents 40 years. This made a total of 430 years that Israel had to bear the consequences of their iniquity.

From this 430-year period, we must subtract 70 years of consequences paid via the Babylonian captivity⁴, which leaves us with a debt of 360 years. God watched the nation for the years following the return from Babylon to see if they would repent of their previous wickedness. God warned in Leviticus 26 that if, after due punishment, Israel did not obey His Word, God would multiply their sentence by seven. If we take the remaining 360 years and multiply by 7 we come to the sum of 2,520 years or 907,200 Babylonian days⁵. Dividing this sum by the present Roman day-for-year, or 365.25, we come to the total of 2484 years. Remember this figure, for our next scene will require it.

Act I scene 3 - Dinner Theater

Ezekiel is directed by God to cook a meal. This would be no problem and would not cause much attention by passersby, but the fuel needed for baking has the prophet disquieted.

“Also take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread of them for yourself. During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it. And your food which you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink. And you shall eat it as barley cakes; and bake it using *fuel of human waste* in their sight.” - Ezekiel 4:9-12

⁴ Jeremiah 25:11 & Daniel 9:2

⁵ A Babylonian year, which most prophecies are based, is 360 days.

All was fine with the prophet until God told him to use human waste to cook this food. He groaned to God that this was too much for his kosher heart to handle. So God granted a little leeway by allowing him to use cow dung instead of human. The picture was supposed to offend the people looking on. It was a representation of Israel having to eat their bread among the Gentiles.

Then the Lord said, "So shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, where I will drive them." - Ezekiel 4:13

The first siege of Babylon took place in 606 BC and ended the captivity seventy years later in 536 BC. Now, using our previous figure of 2484 and counting from 536 BC we come to the year AD 1948. If we adjust for leap year and leap century, we actually come specifically to May 14th 1948, the very day that Israel was reborn as a nation; and just as God had foretold in His word.

"After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely." - Ezekiel 38:8

"If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it... - Deuteronomy 30:3-5

"They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity..." - Jeremiah 31:23

The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them. For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers. - Jeremiah 16:15

It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. - Isaiah 11:11

What would happen to Jerusalem? Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, allowed Jerusalem to continue for another 19 years after the nation of Israel was taken into captivity or 587 BC. Counting 2484 years from this date brings us to 1967, the year Jerusalem was vanquished from Gentile control and declared the capitol of the newly reborn Israel.

Act II scene 1 - A Close Shave

The prophet has now illustrated the beginning point of God's sentence upon Israel for her disobedience. The illustration also lays out how long this time of consequence was to continue. Now, God will illustrate what will happen during this length of time.

“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. 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. You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment. 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.”
Thus says the Lord God, “This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her.” - Ezekiel 5:1-5

The first thing to point out is that God made it very clear that what Ezekiel is about to do with his hair represents Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord God, “This is Jerusalem”. This picture details the main events that will befall this great city.

Ezekiel was to take a barber's razor and cut off all of his hair. He was then to carefully weigh the hair and divide it into three parts. The first part was to be burned with fire. This would represent the burning of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC.

In the [nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon], Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. - 2 kings 25:8-9

Another third of hair was to be struck repeatedly with a sword. This represents the sacking of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70. Rome conquered the entire known world using the (until then, never before used) short sword.

“I hope you, sirs, are now satisfied with the miseries of your country, who have not had any just notions either of great power or of your own great weakness; but have, like madmen, after a violent and inconsiderate manner, made such attempts as have brought your people, your city, and your holy house to destruction.” - Titus Caesar, Josephus: Wars of the Jews, book VI, chapt. VI

The last third was then to be scattered into the wind. This represents the Diaspora where all the Jews fleeing the destruction of Jerusalem scattered among the multitude of Gentile nations where they suffered undo persecution and anti-Semitism, which is why God includes the phrase; “I will draw out a sword after them”. There was no escape from the persecution.

And it shall be, that just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known--wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. - Deuteronomy 28:63-65

There was still a remnant of hair left. Some of this hair was to be woven into the hem of Ezekiel's garment. The hem was the portion of one's tunic that is like the epaulet on the shoulder of an officer; it was a sign of rank. This may point to the rise of the Zionist movement, which emphasized the need to return to the land. This is the only portion of hair that remained with the prophet. By this I see God keeping a remnant handy for later re-gathering into the land.

Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves." - Ezekiel 37:12-13

The last portion was to be burned with fire. In the 1930s the rise of the Nazi regime brought about the holocaust; the murder of six million Jews—most to be burned in ovens or cremated.

"Make a chain, For the land is filled with crimes of blood, And the city is full of violence. Therefore I will bring the *worst* of the Gentiles, And they will possess their houses; I will cause the pomp of the strong to cease, And their holy places shall be defiled. Destruction comes; They will seek peace, but there shall be none. Disaster will come upon disaster, And rumor will be upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; But the law will perish from the priest, And counsel from the elders." - Ezekiel 7:23-26

A nightmare indeed, but provided enough world momentum to bring the remnant back into what was then the country of Palestine, to revert back to the ancient nation of Israel.

To this day, many Jews cannot comprehend why God would allow such atrocities to happen to their people. But God warned them not to disobey His law or reject His Messiah. God made it clear when He declared...

"I will raise up for them a Prophet like [Moses] from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. It shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. - Deuteronomy 28:28-29

Act II scene 2 - The Finale

Ezekiel rises from his long horizontal drama, sets his face against Jerusalem and continues the infamous foretelling. As the curtain falls, we learn that not only did God reveal the future of Israel and Jerusalem, but the very timing that all this would be accomplished. We can look back into the past and see that indeed, God fulfilled His word with exact detail through the performance of a lying prophet.