

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

PART FOUR: Death of Uncle's Wife

"Buzi," Hazak calls out to his friend. "How is your uncle doing?"

"Hasn't said a word now for a week since my aunt died!" Buzi sadly told his friend.

"You mean he has been silent this whole time?" Hazak tries to clarify, since he knew Buzi's uncle never said anything any way whenever he acted out his oracles.

"I will tell you this," Buzi confided. "He told me that my aunt loved me very much." Buzi had trouble telling his friend because of his own personal sorrow that he felt at his aunt's death. He was adopted by them after the initial siege of Jerusalem. "It was all he could say to me and anyone else until he got a sign from the Lord. He has been silent ever since."

"I guess the people are waiting around for another sign or oracle," Hazak ventured.

"No, they are expecting my uncle to do the traditional funeral arrangements," Buzi said.

"It is clear that your uncle will not mourn his wife then," Hazak said, more as a statement than a question.

"They keep waiting for him to give them instructions," Buzi tells him.

"It is quite unusual for the husband to remain silent and not even mourn," Hazak offers.

"As my uncle tells me..." and Hazak joins in the mantra, "...sometimes you have to let the oracle speak for itself."

"So, we are safe to say," Hazak ventures again, "that Jerusalem has fallen!"

"And we are not to mourn her," Buzi adds. Hazak looks at his friend with surprise, then understanding come to his face as he remembers the oracle. At this time Ezekiel covers his eyes as if he were blind with a piece of cloth.

"I wonder what the people will make of this?" Hazak asks Buzi.

"Only time will tell," Buzi answers. "Hilkiah has brought horrible news from Jerusalem!"

"What could be worse than its fall?" Hazak asked.

"The king of Babylon had the sons of our king brought before him and slew them in his sight, as well as the princes of Judah," Buzi clearly shaken as he related the news.

“What could be worse?” Hazak exclaimed.

“Then they blinded our king, Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters and are bringing him to Babylon.

“The last sight he will remember will be the death of his sons!” Hazak mourned.

One final and devastating aspect of this enacted prophecy occurs when Ezekiel is told about the fate of the “prince in Jerusalem.” This oracle is possibly based on reports from witnesses of the fall of the city. It is remarkably the same as the account of Zedekiah’s flight and capture by the Babylonians in 2 Kings 25:4-7. Just as Ezekiel is instructed to cover his eye as if he were blind, Zedekiah is blinded by the soldiers after they execute his sons. All of these events signaled that the people of Jerusalem are no longer citizens of that place.

The analysis of the Book of Ezekiel has already alerted us to the fact that his prophetic mission unfolded in two very distinct phases: one occurring before the siege began that led to the fall of Jerusalem in 586, and the other after news had arrived in Babylon that Jerusalem had actually been destroyed. What Ezekiel felt he was to do and say in the second phase of this mission was quite different from what he had to say in the first one.

These two phases were marked off from one another by two traumatic events: the death of his wife on the evening of the day of the siege of Jerusalem had begun, followed by a period of some two years of dumbness, during which he was seemingly confined to his house.

When national disasters occur, the prophets argue that such calamities are a result of the people’s violation of their covenant with Yahweh. In addition, the prophets repeatedly had provided explicit warning of the disasters about to strike the nation. Therefore, it is possible to claim that God’s willingness to provide a warning is essentially righteous and that harm to the nation does not occur without cause. This explanation of misfortune is based on the assurance that Yahweh is a just and righteous God. Such explanations would have been vital to the exilic community if it were to continue to

worship Yahweh in the face of their own exile and the destruction of Jerusalem.

In one metaphor, Jerusalem is portrayed as an unwanted female infant left to die in an open field. She has been abandoned very soon after birth and has not even been cleansed or wrapped in a garment. Rather than pass by and leave the child to its fate, Yahweh takes pity on the abandoned child, adopts her, and provides for all of her needs. When she reaches maturity God chooses to marry her and provides her with rich robes and jewelry. The new bride, however, is not satisfied with what God has provided, and she chooses to seek the favor of the other lovers/gods.

She squanders all that God has given her, including her children, whom she sacrificed to other gods. Of course, this abandoned child—now grown into an ungrateful wife and mother—symbolized the nation and its infidelities. Israel and Judah had built high places and worshiped other gods and made alliances with Assyria and Egypt instead of trusting Yahweh.

For their many crimes, the people of Jerusalem will be given into the hands of their enemies. Like the peculiar harlot in Ezekiel's metaphor, who pays her lovers instead of receiving payment for them, they will discover what it costs to reject Yahweh.

Rather than abandon them God will act once again to establish an everlasting covenant so that the nation will at last truly know that I am the Lord! In that sense, silence is to be equated with submission to God's authority.