

Super Excellent Master Iowa

2003

Act 1

SEM, Act 1

IM

Rec

Altar

CG

CG

Stew

Opening

IM: Companion Captain of the Guard, are all present Super Excellent Masters?

CG: IM, all present are SE Masters, except the candidates.

IM: Is the sanctuary securely guarded?

CG: I will ascertain and report. Companion Steward, see that the sanctuary is securely guarded.

S goes to door, opens it and says: Companion Sentinel, a Council of SE Masters is about to be opened. Take due notice thereof and guard accordingly.

*Closes door and gives *** ** **. *Answered by Sentinel.*

Companion Captain of the Guard, we are duly guarded and the Sanctuary is secure.

CG: IM, the sanctuary is securely guarded.

IM: What is the hour?

CG: It is the time of the Second Watch.

*IM, ***:* Since it is the time of the Second Watch, let us repair to the Holy Altar and offer up our adorations to Deity, for His protecting care and favor.

Members and candidates remain standing in place. The officers advance and kneel at the altar on their left knee, right elbow resting on right knee, forehead resting on hand, hats on head, according to Jewish custom. After silent prayer:

Arise, let each repair to his station. *Done.*

I now declare a council of SE Masters duly opened. *.

IM: Companion Recorder, is there any business to come before this Council?

Rec: IM, several Companions, Select Masters, are desirous of being introduced into the mysteries of the degree of Super Excellent Master.

IM: Companions, you have heard the announcement of the Recorder; if there is no objection we will confer the degree upon them.

Companion Conductor of the Council, you will present the Candidates.

The candidates are formed into line on the west side of the altar.

Companion Conductor of the Council, whom have you there?

CC: IM, Several Companions, Royal and Select Masters, who are desirous of being introduced into the mysteries of the degree of Super Excellent Masters.

IM to Candidates: Why do you come at this time?

CC: We Royal and Select Masters, having heard tidings that the people of Israel are to be liberated, desire to cast our lot with the Super Excellent Masters. We have therefore, presented ourselves so that if it meets your pleasure we may here and now assume the vows of the craft.

IM: How say you, is Jehovah the only and true God?

CC: He is, and we worship only Him.

IM: In what spirit of mind do you worship him?

CC: In faith.

IM: Have you ever bowed down to graven images or worshiped other gods?

CC: We have not.

IM: Are all true Masons your brothers?

CC: They are.

IM: In what spirit of mind do you regard them?

CC: With Love and Friendship.

IM: Do you acknowledge the vows you have previously taken?

CC: We do.

IM: How will you observe them and the one of this degree?

CC: With Fidelity.

Three candidates may be used at the altar.

IM: It is well, with Faith, Friendship and Fidelity may we ever dwell, and under this pledge, advance, kneel at our Altar and assume the vow.

Candidates kneel on both knees, both hands resting on an altar as in the Master Masons degree.

You will say "I", your name, and remain silent: of my own free will and accord, in the presence of

Almighty God and this Council of Super Excellent Masters, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will forever keep and conceal the secrets of this degree and will not reveal them to anyone except it be to him or them to whom they of right belong.

I furthermore promise that I will conform to and abide by the regulations of this degree so far as they shall come to my knowledge.

I furthermore promise that I will give meat, drink, and lodgings to all poor, worthy Companions, according to their needs and my abilities, and will defend them in danger so far as truth, honor, and justice may warrant.

I furthermore promise that I will not assist or be present at the conferring of this degree on anyone who has not received the preceding degrees, from Entered Apprentice to Select Master inclusive, in a just and lawful manner, to my full and entire satisfaction.

I furthermore promise that I will not bow down to other Gods, nor pay religious adoration to idols, that I will not worship the sun, moon, or stars of heaven, but in good faith and conscience, and to the best of my ability willing worship and serve the only living and true God.

The class and the active candidate will now repeat after me:

All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear without equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion in me whatever, binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my thumbs cut off, my eyes plucked out, my body bound with chains of brass, and carried to a strange and distant land, should I knowingly or willfully violate this, my solemn obligation as a Super Excellent Master, so help me God and keep me steadfast.

Arise. I will now invest with you with the Signs, Grips and Words of this degree:

This is the Due Guard: Hands closes, thumb extended, cross thumb and raise up. It alludes to the penalty of your Obligation, and is the sign with which you salute the presiding officer when entering or retiring from a council of Super Excellent Masters.

This is the first sign: Hands closed, thumbs extended, arms crossed on the breast, rise arms up; put thumb to eye. It also alludes to the penalty.

This is the second sign: Right hand closed, first and second finger extended, point to your own eyes, then dart them forward horizontally. This also alludes to the penalty.

This is the hailing sign: Right hand closed, then extended. Make a zig zag motion from left shoulder to right hip. This alludes to the chains of brass.

Words accompanying Za-her-la-her-bon, signifying Remember the destruction.

This is the past grip *given*. It is the same as the Pass Grip of a Mark Master, except that the thumbs are raised, pressing each other alternately.

Password: So-lee-mah

This is the True Grip *given*. Take pass grip with both hands. (right up) arms crossed. One says Sau, the first King of Judea, the other Zedekiah, the last King of Judea.

You will now be seated.

The emblems of this degree are the square, the triangle, and the circle. Their symbolism will now be explained to you.

The square is one of the most significant of the emblems of Masonry. Its four equal sides subtended by four perfect angles, symbolize the four Cardinal Virtues, which are imprinted upon the memory and engraven upon the very soul of every true Mason: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice.

In Masonry every Perfect Ashlar must be true and square, in order that the structure may possess strength and beauty, each living stone must be squared by the square of truth and virtue, in order that the Masonic edifice may continue to hold aloft its horary head, crowned with majesty and clothed with stately lines, to

be in the future, as in the past, the wonder and admiration of all ages.

The Triangle or delta is emblematic of Deity, its three equal sides representing His omnipotence,, His omniscience and His omnipresence; His universal power, universal knowledge and universal presence. It also symbolizes the triumph of Freemasonry over Ignorance, Intolerance, and Bigotry, the three greatest enemies of human liberty and progress. It also teaches the three great virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, reminding us of our triple duties as Masons, those we owe to God, to our neighbors and to ourselves, teaching Faith in God, all-wise, all-powerful, and all-merciful; Hope in the ultimate triumph of truth over every form of error, and Charity, or Love, for all mankind, especially our brethren.

The circle is an emblem of friendship, the Sacred Law in the center, like the blazing star in the Mosaic pavement, is an emblem of Divine Providence, the radii from which verge in direct lines to every part of the circle, and end in that. It is also emblematic of the circle of our moral duties, reminding us of the point within a circle in the Entered Apprentice degree. It is further an emblem of eternity, having neither beginning nor end. This emblem encourages the hope of a full immortality by faith in the Divine Promise.

Prologue

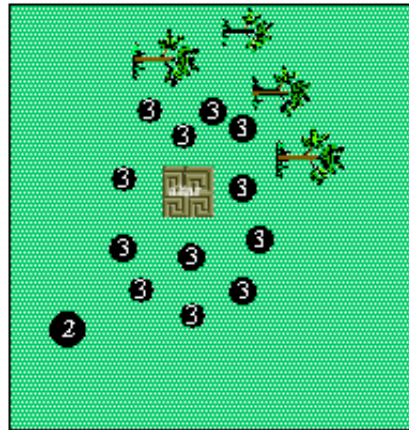
Welcome guests and Companions, the drama of the Last King of Judea refers to circumstances, which occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuzaradan, commander of the Army of the King of Babylon. The drama is intended to represent the final destruction of the King Solomon's Temple and the carrying away of the captive Jews to Babylon.

The opening scene represents the captives in Babylon, under the direction of Ezekiel, the Prophet. Here in their darkest hour, under a foreign despot, there came to them from the Sacred Law a peaceful light from Heaven, promising a final restoration to the scenes of their former glory.

The second scene of this drama is laid in one of the apartments of Temple, and the events narrated therein, occurred in the last hour of the last day of the third, and last siege of Jerusalem. Zedekiah, the last and twentieth King of Judea, was upon the throne. His infidelity to his vows, his contempt for the Prophet of God, and his cowardly acquiescence to his false Councilors are faithfully depicted.

SEM, Act 2

Scene 1



A small oasis with a grassy
area, altar and several palm
trees.

2 – Ezekiel

3 – Jews resting

The third scene represents Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, with his court at Riblah. Jerusalem had been taken, Zedekiah was a fugitive and captive, his arraignment and terrible punishment follows. Zion is desolate.

Act II

Prologue to Act II, scene 1

P: The first scene represents a typical incident in the captive life of the Jews in Babylon, where they were taken after the fall of Jerusalem in the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah, the last of the Judean kings. Here you see them in their captivity and that of their perjured king. They have been toiling in the nearby fields and are returning to camp. They gather at the close of the day, where the Prophet Ezekial seeks to console them by reading from their Sacred Writings. The Prophet Jeremiah is in Jerusalem.

A long line of Jews, very weary, enter from the south door with various tools. Behind the line is a Persian overseer with a whip, encouraging the Jews to move. They move past a well, where Ezekial gives each. The procession leaves through the north door and returns with stones. They move to the altar, stack the stones, and assume attitudes of rest.

E, reading: How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. (*Psalms CXXXVII, 4-6*)

E, reading: How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that

was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary? She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies (*Lamentations I:1-2*)

All singing in sorrowful voices: By Babel's stream we sit and weep; Our tears for Zion flow; Our harps on drooping willows sleep; Our hearts are filled with woe.

E, reading: By rivers of Babylon there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song, and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion. (*Psalms CXXXVII: 1-3*)

All singing as before: Our walls no more resound with praise; Our Temple foes destroy; Judea's courts no more upraise triumphant songs of joy.

E, reading: Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude; she dwelleth among the heathen; she findeth no rest; all her persecutors overtook her between the straits. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts; all her gates are desolate; her priests sigh; her virgins are afflicted; and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children are gone into captivity, before the enemy. (*Lam. I:3,4,5*)

All: Here, mourning, toil the captive bands; Our feasts and Sabbaths cease; Our tribes, dispersed through distant lands, Are hopeless of release.

A courier enters hastily and presents a scroll to Ezekiel. The courier retires.

E: A message from Jeremiah!

The companions rise, crowd around Ezekiel as quickly as possible. Ezekiel reads: Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon, build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them.

Take ye wives and beget ye sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters, that ye may be increased there, and not diminished.

For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished in Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

For I know the thoughts I think toward you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (*Jeremiah XXIX:4-6, 10, 11*)

All sing in more powerful voices: Then shall the ever-gracious power to us propitious be, Chaldeans shall our race restore, And kings proclaim us free.

E: And now, my Companions, let us to our rest. The tasks of tomorrow await us. We shall need all our strength of both mind and body.

Let us endure with patience having faith in Jehovah and His promises.

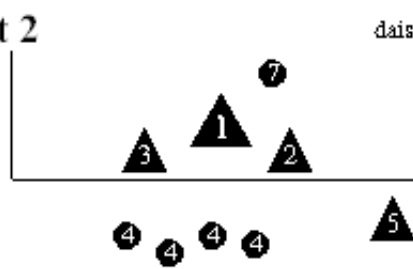
Let us be ever faithful to our pledges and obligations and true to our God, our brethren and our fellowmen.

So may we ever walk in faith, promote friendship and practice fidelity.

All: Companions take up their stones and exit through north door, following Ezekiel.

SEM, Act 2

Scene 2



5

6

6

- | |
|---------------------------|
| 1 - Zedekiah |
| 2 - Pashur |
| 3 - Zephaniah |
| 4 - Concubines |
| 5 - Gedeliah |
| 6 - Keepers of the Temple |
| 7 - Wine Server |

Scene 2, The Court of Zedekiah, Last King of Judea Prologue to Scene 2

P: You have just had an intimation of the servitude and sadness of a people in captivity. How they came to be in such condition is the subject matter of the two scenes that follow.

The next scene represents the court of Zedekiah at Jerusalem. This wicked and faithless king had been besieged within the walls of his city for eighteen months and the scene shows the last day of that siege, closing with the capture of the city.

The scene begins just after a herald has brought reports from the wall of the city.

The scene opens with Zedekiah, his council and concubines raveling in lust and pleasure. After a short interlude, a trumpet sounds. A herald approaches with a scroll, approaches Gedeliah and hands it to him, then retires. Gedeliah reads the scroll. He sits back down and drops the scroll on the floor

KZ: Prince Gedeliah, what news brought the herald?

G, standing, and remains standing: That Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon approaches with innumerable forces and fills the city.

KZ: How did they report the enemy?

G: That he was formidable and victorious, approaching the King's palace, and within a few furlongs of the Temple, and everywhere is unhallowed ravage and devastation.

P: Mighty Sovereign, be not discouraged, I pray thee, by these false reports. The King of Babylon shall not prevail against thee. I myself have learned that King Nebuchadnezzar has been completely overwhelmed

by your armies and your noble allies, the Egyptians.

There is a disturbance at the door. The Keepers go quickly to the entrance. Jeremiah forces his way inside the door.

J: Hinder me not. I will see the King, I will see the King.

IK, advances and addresses the King: Jeremiah has escaped from prison.

KZ: Jeremiah! Why comes he hither?

To Jeremiah, who is being restrained by the Keepers:

Jeremiah! Thou didst promise to abide in the court of the prison. Why hast thou come without my consent?

J: I have a message that will not wait.

KZ: Keepers, go hence until you are called.

The Keepers go back to their stations, Then KZ continues:

And now Jeremiah, thy message.

J advances to the center of the chamber:

The fate of Israel, her city and Temple, hang trembling in the balance. This day – nay, this hour – must decide if the Kingdom founded by Jehovah, and the Temple erected by Solomon his servant, shall together and forever cease to be. Ere the cockcrows shall it be decided if thou be indeed the last King of Judah. For this reason, therefore, I have come to thee, O King. I have come to conjure thee to leave off thy impieties and transgressions and to take care of that which is right, and neither to give ear to those wicked advisers, nor to yield credit to their false prophesies who have deluded thee. They told thee that the King of Babylon would no more make war against thee, and that the King of Egypt would make war against him and conquer him. They told thee after Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to our city, that the King of Egypt came with a mighty army to drive the Babylonians away and that the army of Nebuchadnezzar had given up the siege, having been driven away by the Egyptians. And then they steeped thy soul in forgetfulness. They filled thine ears with unholy music. They catered to thy pleasures with wine and to thy lust with harlots and concubines. They told thee not that the Egyptian Army had be routed and destroyed, but I tell thee that the Babylonian Army has again renewed the siege, that even now they make a passing breach in the walls, and that they may be upon us at any moment. Lo, I prophesy.

Keepers drop to their knees in attitude of fear.

J: Before another dawn shall lighten the Eastern sky the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar shall throng the courts of the Temple and everywhere shall be unhallowed ravage and destruction.

Kps: Lord, have mercy.

J: I see thee, O King, a fugitive upon the Plains of Jericho.

Kps: Lord, have mercy.

J: I see thee caught like a skulking dog, thy sons slain before thine eyes.

Kps: Lord, have mercy.

J: I see thee bound in chains of brass and carried a Captive to Babylon.

Kps: Lord, have mercy.

J: I see the Holy Place defiled by the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar, and the Shekinah departed from Israel forever.

Kps: Lord, have mercy.

J: All this must be unless thou repent.

Kps rise and approach Gedeliah.

KN confers with his courtiers.

P: Heed him not, O King. His troubles have made him mad.

Z: The old man's mind wanders.

P: Long confinement in prison has unsettled his reason.

Z: It was ever his wont to prate of naught but woe and lamentation.

KZ: Jeremiah, I long have loved thee and have often listened to thy words. I have heard and believed agreeing to that which thou hast said as true, yet now do I recall that ever thy sayings were heavy with tales of woe. Naught else hast thou ever dinned into mine ears. Thy soul was surely begot 'neath gloomy shades. For thee the sun never shines, lovers do not love, birds do *not sing, nor flowers bloom. Canst thou no, O Priest, prophesy pleasant things?*

J: Wouldst thou have me merry while death hangs over our people? Wouldst thou have me speak lightly when destruction broods over our city and Temple? Yet, fain would I prophesy pleasant things – yea, verily, I bring thee good tidings if thou wilt but repent. Repent and I will pray the Lord God of Israel for thee. The hosts of Nebuchadnezzar are thundering at our gates, yet if thou wilt repent, even now, the God of our Fathers will deliver thee out of his hands. Listen to the promise:

Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: *Soft music* "Then will I build thee up and not pull thee down; then will I plant thee and not pluck thee up for I repent me of the evil I have done thee. Be not afraid of the King of Babylon. Be not afraid of him, saith the Lord, for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee from out his hands, and I will show mercies upon thee, that thou and thy children shall dwell in the land forever."

Music ceases.

Then shall the prophecy spoken by Ezekiel be turned back.

Z: Ha! He speaks of the prophecy of Ezekiel. *Retires to get the scrolls.*

P: I pray thee; judge this matter with an even mind. Yon prophet did say that thou shouldst go bound to Babylon, Ezekiel did say that thou shouldest never see Babylon.

Z: Here are the rolls. I pray thee compare them.

P: They cannot both be true.

KZ examines rolls. Then, to Jeremiah: How sayest thou of Ezekiel? Is he a true prophet?

J: Ezekiel is a Priest and Prophet of the living God.

KZ: And thou, art thou also such?

J: Yea, Oh King, I am also such.

KZ: Ezekiel did say that I never should see Babylon.

J: Yea.

KZ: And thou sayest I shall be taken bound to Babylon?

J: Yea.

KZ: But how shall I believe you both?

J: Darest thou juggle with the words of prophecy?

KZ: Thou hast not answered my question.

J: Once more answer thou my question, and take heed to thine answer. Wilt thou repent and become obedient?

KZ confers with his courtiers: Jeremiah! Go thy way.

J, kneeling before the King: oh, King, thou seest that which no mortal man ever saw before. A Priest and Prophet of Israel kneeling to any save his God. Dear Prince, relent.

KZ: Go thy way!

J: I go. *Rises.*

Yes, I go. Farewell. Henceforth thou shalt see my face no more forever.

Starts to go out, hesitates, then turns and speaks to Zedekiah

And now will I read to thee the riddle, the answer to which thou dost not guess. Bound thou shalt go to Babylon. Babylon thou shalt not see, for after the King of Babylon shall have wrecked his vengeance upon

thee, thou shalt go sightless.

Jeremiah exits.

G follows Jeremiah to the door and stands, looking out.

Kps follow Gedeliah to the door and stand, looking out.

KZ examines rolls, then to Gedeliah:

Gedeliah, take these rolls and place them in the archives.

G stands still and continues to look.

KZ, loudly: Gedeliah!

G turns and slowly approaches the King, looking back over his shoulder. Takes the rolls and starts to leave.

KZ: How now, Gedeliah; why this rueful countenance? Thou art as cheerless as yon woe-begotten old man.

G: Oh King, my soul is full of heaviness, even unto death.

KZ: Wherefore?

G: Thou hast refused to harken unto the voice of God speaking through his Prophet.

KZ: Thou holdest in thy hands the rolls and knowest their testimony is not alike.

G: Yea Oh King, I know; but my soul quakes with the fearful import of his words.

KZ: Dost thou then believe he spoke true?

G: Yea O King. I would stake my life upon his words of prophecy.

KZ, hesitates: Go!

HP: The soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar have defiled the Holy of Holies and the Shekinah has departed. The courts of the Temple are filled with carnage.

KZ: Gedeliah! Is there no way of escape?

G: None, save by way of the King's garden, between the walls, by the private entrance leading out to the Plains of Jericho.

KZ: By that way we will make our escape.

The King, guards, courtiers, and H.P. rush out, exiting in southeast. Optionally pursued by Chaldeans who enter from the west and rush east. If we use this Gedeliah and the Keepers who remain must hid from the Persians. There is a pause, followed by a trumpet sounding.

A herald enters after the trumpet is heard.

G: What tidings of the King?

H: The King, with his household and all his men of war fled by way of the gate between the walls, which is by the King's garden, and the army of the Chaldeans pursed him and overtook him upon the Plains of Jericho and all his army were scattered from him.

G: Oh Jeremiah, Jeremiah! Bring Jeremiah hither.

The 1st Keeper retires, and returns with Jeremiah. The 2nd and 3rd Keeper fall in behind them as they pass by. All four mount the dais. The 1st Keeper passes to Gedeliah's left, to a position just behind him, facing inward. The 2nd and 3rd Keepers stop opposite Gedeliah and the 1st Keeper and face them. Jeremiah steps between and faces west. Gedeliah and the Keepers should quarter face to the west.

J: Why sendest thou for me? Why art thou so cast down? What news of the King?

G: The King, with his household and all his men of war fled by way of the gate between the walls, which is by the King's garden, and the army of the Chaldeans pursed him and overtook him upon the Plains of Jericho and all his army were scattered from him. Alas! Our young men are captive, our old men are slain; the sword of the enemy prevails.

G and Kps drop to their knees and bow their heads, depressed.

Kps kneel with G, bowing their heads, depressed.

J, as if soliloquizing, reflectively:

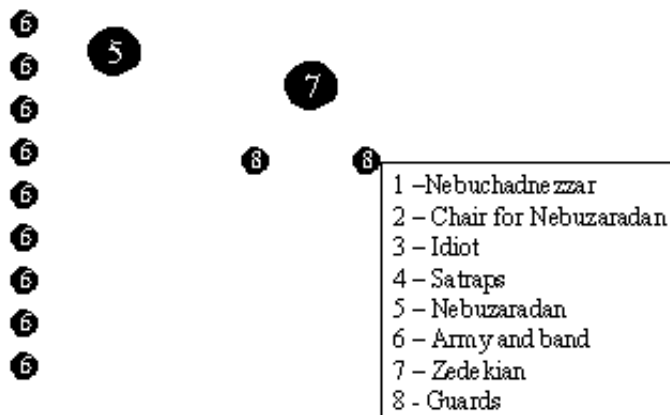
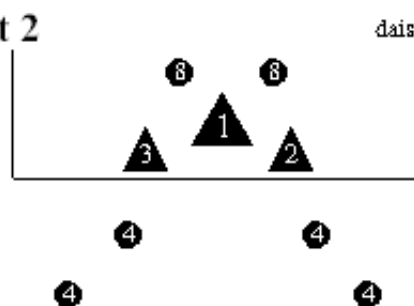
Verily, verily, the prophesies of the servants of God are fulfilled. JEHOVAH reigneth! THUS shall the wicked come to destruction. Judah is vanquished and her people must suffer in captivity.

In a firm voice: But the Lord God of Israel *G and Kps look up quickly at Jeremiah* will not forsake His people. "I will raise up mighty men among them," saith the Lord, "and they shall return to the land of their fathers." It is for us who remain to keep alive the voice of God until their coming. Arise *J motions them up and G and Kps rise to their feet, looking inventively at J.* ye servants of the Most High, renew *J raises his right arm to form a triangle with G and Kps who also raise their right arms* you pledge of fidelity to the Lord God of Israel. Plant deep *J, G and Kps place there right hands on their left breasts and let arms drop* in your hearts the terrors of infidelity. Go forth and aid the worthy poor and lead the faltering to a higher devotion. "Make ready for the day of their coming for they shall return," saith the Lord. I, Jeremiah *G and Kps drop on left knee, bring palms of hand together in front of neck, ends of finders level with chin in perfect tableau* have proclaimed the prophesy. Let your children's children greet them with God's promise on their coming in that day: *J steps forward on right foot, thrusting right arm as high as possible* ISRAEL LIVES.

Curtain

SEM, Act 2

Scene 3



Scene 3, Court of Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah

P: The last scene represents the court of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who has just come up from Babylon to Riblah, about 100 miles northwest of Jerusalem, and there set up his court to await the capture of Jerusalem. Here the captured King of Judah was brought before him to receive the just desert for his infidelity.

Trumpets sound, sentry opens door and asks: Who approaches?

CG: Nebuzradan, Captain of the Guard desires an audience with the King.

W: Nebuzradan, Captain of the Guard desires an audience with your Majesty.

KN to councilors: How fortunate that Nebuzradan has come to Riblah so soon after our arrival from Babylon.

To Sentry: Let him enter.

Sentry salutes and opens door. Army enters from northwest door, followed by band. Marches around hall and out northeast door. If Foot Patrol is present, band stops inside door so Foot Patrol can do maneuvers. When finished, all march out.

Enters with escort of Companions. Marches to north side and halts. Escort right face; Nebuzradan advances and salutes. The escort, under CG remain in place.

K: Nebuzradan, I am indeed glad thou hast come to Riblah, for I did come up from Babylon to speak to thee concerning that Jewish King Zedekiah. Surely thou dost remember the many great wars in which my armies have been victorious under thy command – all the great Kings from the River of Egypt to the River Euphrates have been made to pay homage and tribute – therefore, I ask thee Nebuzradan, why hast thou for eighteen long months permitted this weak vassal, Zedekiah, to withstand our mighty army, our chariots and horsemen? Hast thou lost thy cunning? Hast thou become less a warrior, that this weakest of rulers hath put thee to naught? Remember, Nebuzradan, nearly two years have passed since I commanded thee to bring this wicked King Zedekiah before me.

N: Mighty Sovereign! Hear me, I pray thee. Since thou didst make me Captain of thy Guard I have led thy armies in many fierce conflicts to victory, but never to defeat. I swear to thee that my arm is as strong, my nerve as steady, and my brain as clear now as ever before, but this wicked King is full of subtlety, and as thou knowest, did enter into alliance with the King of Egypt, and secured the aid of Pharaoh's army, which for a time diverted by attack upon Jerusalem, but we did overwhelm them, and returned again to the siege upon Jerusalem, and I now come to thee with good tidings of victory. Our assault has been successful. Jerusalem is taken, and their last stronghold is in our hands, but King Zedekiah and all his men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the walls, which is by the King's garden, leading out upon the Plains of Jericho, and thus escaped . . .

KN: Zedekiah escaped! He whose capture I most desired! Speak! Nebuzradan – sayest thou Zedekiah escaped?

N: Yea O King. But our army pursued after him and overtook him on the Plains of Jericho, made him prisoner and he is now without and awaits your commands.

KN to councilors: At last, then, the conquest of that city is again accomplished. Twice before, when our armies invested Jerusalem, did their King submit tamely, opening his gates without resistance; but this Zedekiah, whom I myself placed upon the throne and who swore to me an oath that he would keep his kingdom for me and make no league of friendship with the Egyptians, hath despised his oath and defied our armies.

Surely now I will make desolation in the place of that proud city, but, until I have poured out my punishment upon the head of its wicked ruler, my vengeance will not be complete.

To the soldiers of Nebuzaradan: Bring the captive before me.

CG salutes and gives commands necessary to retire from southwest door. KN speaking to N: Most noble Nebuzaradan, accept our commendation and grateful thanks. Thy faithfulness shall not go unrewarded. Captain of our Guard thou hast been. I now make thee Grand Captain of all our Armies. Be seated near the throne.

N moves to empty chair is seated on the dais.

CG brings Zedekiah in through the northwest, giving such commands as to bring escort to a halt on the north side. Zedekiah is in chains, his clothing disordered. The CG & LG push Zedekiah before the king and take stations with the army.

KN: Aha! Thou base and perjured Zedekiah, thou wicked covenant breaker, at last I have thee in my power!

Did not I set thee on thy throne, in the room of Johoiachin, after that I had taken him captive?

KZ: Yea, sir.

KN: And didst thou not then solemnly agree and covenant with me, swearing by the name of thy God, that thou wouldst be faithful unto me, and hold thy kingdom loyal unto me? Answer me.

KZ: Yes, sir, but thou didst demand of me the impossible. I am a man in whose veins runs blood as royal as thine own. Take these chains, array me in my own pomp and glory, and I will show thee that I can play the Monarch as well as thou.

KN, interrupting: Silence! Wouldst thou flout me to my face? Thou hast well said, that thou canst play the King, but thou canst not be a King, thou canst not even be loyal to a friend – and I was that friend. Thou canst not be faithful to a trust – and I trusted thee; and how hast thou repaid me? The chief glory in the crown of manhood is fidelity, and the brightest jewel in the diadem of a Monarch is fidelity, and behold, there is not one of thy promises that thou hast not broken, for thou didst enter into alliance with the King of Egypt, and didst make rebellion against me, so that thou hast twice compelled me to come up against thee with all my armies, my chariots and my horsemen -

KZ, interrupting: Hear me, pray, I did no more than thou wouldst have done, hadst thou been placed in my situation. Couldst thou blame me if I would free my people from thy yoke? Pashur and Zephaniah did counsel me to throw off thy rule. I know thee to be a hard and cruel man, reaping where thou hast not sown and gathering where thou hast not strewn -

KN, interrupting: It may be all true that thou hast said, but my bitterest foe hath yet to say that Nebuchadnezzar ever betrayed a trust, or was false to a friend. Thou wert false to me.

And surely it is thine own God that has delivered thee into my hands, because thou didst mock his messengers and practice cruelty towards his prophets, placing them in prison, and in the stocks, and even in the pit of mire, and hast more and more hardened thy heart and stiffened thy neck until there is no remedy except thy complete destruction.

Therefore, this is the judgment that I pronounce upon thee and upon thy people.

Nebuzaradan, Captain of our armies shall utterly destroy thy city of Jerusalem.

The Temple shall be burned with fire, and remaining remnant of its vessels and ornaments shall be broken and carried to Babylon, thy palaces and the houses of thy great men shall be destroyed and the walls of the city thrown down even to the ground, and all the people that have escaped the famine and the pestilence and the sword shall be taken captive to Babylon.

And as for thee, it is my order that thy sons be slain before thine eyes, that none of thy perjured race may remain after thee, and that thou mayest see and know that thou art indeed the last King of Judah, and then that thou mayest know that the words of the prophets of thy God were true when the one said that thou shouldest be taken to Babylon, while the other said that thou shouldest not see Babylon, thine eyes shall be

put out and thou be taken in chains of brass unto Babylon. *Laughs.*

KZ: Have mercy! Have Mercy!

KN rises: I Nebuchadnezzar have spoken the judgment. Let it be executed with speed. Away with him.

Guards remove Zedekiah in a half fainting condition, dragging him out backwards.

Most noble Captain of our Armies, it is my order that the captive Jews, together with their King be taken forthwith to Babylon. See that the remnant of the poor left under Gedeliah are supplied with seed for their planting, and that no harm befalls Jeremiah. Form the lines for our March to Babylon.

N takes command of the escort, marching them out through the southeast door. KN and courtiers fall in behind. They return with Foot Patrol and Band through the northwest door with Zedekiah and other prisoners. Zedekiah eyes are bound in bandages and he is lead as blinded around the hall.

Curtain

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