

Ezekiel 7

In a small town, a street preacher named Nate Evans walked every day, preaching to the few people who drove past. “Repent, the End of the World is Near!” he proclaimed.

One day, as he was walking near the edge of town, he came upon a big lever sticking out of the side of the road. It had a sign next to it that read, “Pull this lever to end the world.”

Nate thought this was the perfect location for his message of coming destruction. So Nate set up a pulpit next to the lever, and he began to preach with great conviction on the coming destruction. Soon many drivers were parked along the roadside listening intently.

All was going well, until the road became congested with cars, and just then an 18-wheeler came barreling down the highway so fast that he couldn’t stop in time. To avoid running into the road full of parked cars, the truck driver swerved onto the shoulder, but now now he’s headed straight for Nate and that lever. In split second, the truck driver had to make a choice: run over Nate, or run over the lever.

As the driver later explained to the Highway Patrol officer, he had no choice. Pointing to Nate’s dead body, the driver said, “Better Nate than lever.”

- There have always been doomsayers predicting the end of the world, but so far the only end that’s come is their own
 - It’s easy to make predictions, but it’s a lot harder to bring them to pass
 - Unless a herald’s proclamation is based on the authority of God’s word, he is destined to humiliation
 - The Lord has revealed how the world will end, and He’s revealed the times and circumstances we should watch for
 - But we also know the Church won’t be here to experience the terrible things God has planned
 - So we aren’t concerned by what we read in scripture knowing we aren’t appointed to God’s wrath
 - Even more, we can completely ignore the doomsayers and their false predictions, as Jesus instructed
 - The people of Israel had a similar confidence

- They knew from the word of God they were God's chosen people
- They knew they had been promised a glorious future in a kingdom to come
- But when it came to hearing the word of God, Israel had a selective attention
 - They heard the promises of blessings, but conveniently they overlooked the warnings God issued against them
 - As the Lord sent prophet after prophet to tell the people that their sin would bring serious consequence, the people rejected God's word
 - In the end, they usually killed the prophet to silence him
- This history explains why we have chapter 7 in the book of Ezekiel
 - The Lord is still explaining to the people of Israel that judgment is nigh
 - He's used pantomime
 - He's used graphic images
 - And He's speaking through Ezekiel's words
 - But the Lord knows the people aren't listening yet
 - So today, He tell Ezekiel to speak against the nation once more
 - He's already spoken against the people and against the land
 - Now the Lord finishes by speaking against the nation's prosperity and safety in their land
 - His point is clear...just because you're God's covenant people doesn't mean you're safe from God's vengeance
 - On the contrary, it was *because* Israel was in covenant with the Lord that there would be an accounting for their sin
 - And so the Lord speaks once more through Ezekiel in late summer of 592 BC

Ezek. 7:1 Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezek. 7:2 “And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel, ‘An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land.

Ezek. 7:3 ‘Now the end is upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways and bring all your abominations upon you.

Ezek. 7:4 ‘For My eye will have no pity on you, nor will I spare you, but I will bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the Lord!’

Ezek. 7:5 “Thus says the Lord God, ‘A disaster, unique disaster, behold it is coming!’

Ezek. 7:6 ‘An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come!’

Ezek. 7:7 ‘Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near – tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains.

Ezek. 7:8 ‘Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you and spend My anger against you; judge you according to your ways and bring on you all your abominations.

Ezek. 7:9 ‘My eye will show no pity nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the Lord, do the smiting.

- I want you to imagine Ezekiel standing on a street corner in Tel Aviv in Babylon yelling, “An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land!”
 - That’s what the Lord has told him to do, and I’m sure it had a predictable effect on the people
 - A few listened perhaps
 - But more likely most people looked at Ezekiel as a crazy old man
 - Remember, this prophecy is coming on the heels of 14 months of Ezekiel lying on the ground
 - He’s spent 430 days staring at a brick while holding a iron baking sheet
 - Anyone could have been excused for thinking Ezekiel’s missing a few crayons in the box
 - But now he’s moved from a curiosity to a threat
 - He’s telling the people of Israel that the Lord is about to bring a measure of destruction upon the people never before seen
 - Curiously, he’s speaking to exiles, who have already experienced that judgment

- They have already seen their city attacked and now they're sitting in captivity
- If you and I were present at this moment, we might tell Ezekiel that his message was a little late
- But that's not how Israel thought
 - Though they many Jews were living in captivity, they knew their city still stood
 - The walls were mostly intact and still defended
 - The temple still stood and the priests were still making daily sacrifices
 - Fields were planted, feasts were celebrated, life went on
 - So from the exiles' point of view, their situation was only temporary
 - We could compare their experience to that of a hostage like the Americans held in Teheran during the Iranian hostage crises of the late 70s
 - Though they were in dire circumstances, they never feared for their country's destruction
 - And they hoped that one day they would be released and come home
 - That's how it felt to be an exile in Babylon
 - They had hope that they would go home one day
 - As long as Jerusalem continued, they believed the Lord would protect them
 - And if not them personally, certainly their sons and daughters would go back
- They never considered the possibility that their city and temple could be utterly destroyed and the people exiled for centuries
 - This confidence wasn't based in their own strength
 - It was based in their expectation that the God of Israel would protect His people forever and regardless of the threat
 - And the history of Israel seemed to support that conclusion

- Multiple times over the centuries, the nation had been confronted by superior forces only to emerge victorious by God's hand
 - On one occasions, the city was preserved from an overwhelming Assyrian force when the Angel of the Lord single-handedly killed 185,000 men overnight
 - When you have that kind of supernatural protection, you assume that you're invincible
- But Israel wasn't invincible, because the same Lord who vanquished 185,000 Assyrians was now preparing to turn His wrath against His own people
 - Despite His mercy and faithfulness to them, Israel had sinned against Him time and time again
 - So now the time had come to bring about the consequences the Lord promised would come
 - Beginning with making sure His people understand their fate was a result of His wrath
- A couple of phrases stand out in the passage
 - First, the Lord repeats five times that an end is coming
 - Despite their unjustified confidence, their days of comfort and protection were coming to an end
 - In fact, they've already ended, He says, as evidenced by their presence in exile
 - Secondly, the Lord twice emphasizes that these judgments will bring Israel to know that He is the Lord
 - That's the central problem that the Lord is working to fix
 - This episode isn't merely retribution, though it will accomplish that purposes as well
 - The coming destruction of Jerusalem will bring Israel back to an understanding of the true God
 - We learned last week that the Lord's hard treatment of His people is the result of centuries of Israel engaging in the worst abominations possible
 - They have been given plenty of chances

- And God was long-suffering
- But sooner or later God must act in keeping with His word, and so now that time has come

Ezek. 7:10 'Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed.

Ezek. 7:11 'Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, none of their people, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them.

Ezek. 7:12 'The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude.

Ezek. 7:13 'Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they both live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity.

- The die is cast for Israel...doom is coming and it can't be stopped
 - The Lord explains the reason for this calamity using a metaphor
 - Imagine a weed growing up out of the ground
 - If left to grow long enough, it eventually becomes strong and blossoms
 - That's what's happened to Israel
 - Like a weed left to grow, their violent and rebellious hearts grew into a rod of wickedness
 - Eventually it budded into arrogance, an unjustified confidence
 - God granted the nation centuries to repent, but that mercy just emboldened them to sin all the more
 - They misinterpreted the Lord's patience as approval
 - And it gave more opportunity for their hearts to harden
 - The Lord gave Israel time to climb out of the hole they had dug for themselves
 - Instead, they used the time to keep on digging and told themselves the Lord appreciated the dirt

- Now the good news is the Lord is merciful and patient with His children

**Psa. 145:8 The Lord is gracious and merciful;
Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.**

- The Lord is literally the perfect parent
 - If you've ever witnessed a parent responding too quickly or too angrily to a child's error (or if you've ever been that parent), then you can appreciate the importance being slow to anger
 - Having a friend or parent or spouse who is slow to show anger when we make mistakes is a blessing
 - But having a God who is slow to anger in the face of our sin is priceless
- But in both cases, we can misuse the mercy we receive
 - We allow our parent's or spouse's restraint to become license for further offense
 - Or we tell ourselves that the Lord's slow response to our sin means He's not concerned in our behavior, so we continue
 - Our false sense of security becomes license to continue our sinful ways, and so we squander the Lord's patience
- As you've heard me say many times, believers in Jesus Christ are saved from the penalty of sin in eternity
 - Our faith in Christ has cleared our debts before God
 - We are credited with Christ's righteousness, so our heavenly standing is literally perfect
 - And we can never lose nor sin our way out of God's forgiveness
 - That's the promise of the New Covenant
- Meanwhile, we are called to live for the goal of pleasing the Lord, seeking to keep His commandments the best we can
 - We cooperate with the Spirit to put away sin and conform our lives to the word of God
 - Nevertheless, along the way of life, we'll all make mistakes

- But the Lord, being loving and merciful toward His children, will give us time to repent and opportunity to come back into obedience
- He's our perfect Father above, but don't mistake His patience for disinterest or approval
- If we go on sinning willfully, eventually He may act to correct us, as He is doing here with Israel
 - The severity of His response in this case was a direct result of the severity of Israel's sin and the length of time He gave them
 - Which suggests a simple principle
 - The longer the Lord gives us to repent and return, the more severe the consequence will be if we don't return
 - Though our salvation and eternal glory is never at risk, we ought not test the Lord to see what He's prepared to do when we spurn His patience
- After all we've read about Israel's judgment, we still find a few new things in this passage
 - In vs.12-13 Lord says He will take from Israel all their wealth
 - He says neither the buyer nor seller will be able to rejoice
 - He's referring to unique circumstances of commerce in the days between the second and third battles of Jerusalem
 - After Nebuchadnezzar first two assaults on the city, land owners Judah began to worry about their future prospects
 - They couldn't be sure they would be around to enjoy the land
 - So they began to sell their land hoping to obtain something they could take with them or perhaps hide until the Babylonians were gone
 - With everyone looking to sell, the value of property began to drop
 - So that even the seller who found a buyer would mourn the prospect of giving up valuable land at fire-sale prices

- Naturally, those willing to buy the land despite the uncertain future were rejoicing at the good fortune
 - They obtained land for a fraction of its value
 - They hoped they would avoid exile and could use the cheap land to make a tidy profit
- But both seller and buyer were working on an assumption that despite the troubles, Israel would continue on
 - A buyer only rejoices if he assumes he will be able to use the land he purchased
 - And a seller only mourns if he assumes someone else will be profiting on his misfortune
- But neither assumption is was true
 - The Law of Israel stipulated that land could only be sold for 49 years, at which point it returns to the original owner
 - But the Lord says in v.13 that the seller will not regain the property for as long as both he and the buyer live
 - The Lord is saying that the entire nation would remain outside their land for generations
- Which means the Lord will strip the people of their source of power and strength
 - Remember, I said the Lord is systematically tearing down the nation's three sources of blessing as given in the Abrahamic Covenant
 - The Lord is judging Israel's people, their land (high places), and their prosperity or strength as the chief nation
 - Remember, these promises are reserved for those who share in Abraham's faith, and ultimately they are fulfilled in the kingdom
 - In the meantime, the nation could experience a foretaste of these things so long as they obeyed the Old Covenant
 - Since they disobeyed that covenant, the Lord is removing these blessings from earthly Israel, including taking their strength

Ezek. 7:14 ‘They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but no one is going to the battle, for My wrath is against all their multitude.

Ezek. 7:15 ‘The sword is outside and the plague and the famine are within. He who is in the field will die by the sword; famine and the plague will also consume those in the city.

Ezek. 7:16 ‘Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity.

Ezek. 7:17 ‘All hands will hang limp and all knees will become like water.

Ezek. 7:18 ‘They will gird themselves with sackcloth and shuddering will overwhelm them; and shame will be on all faces and baldness on all their heads.

Ezek. 7:19 ‘They will fling their silver into the streets and their gold will become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their appetite nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling.

Ezek. 7:20 ‘They transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things with it; therefore I will make it an abhorrent thing to them.

Ezek. 7:21 ‘I will give it into the hands of the foreigners as plunder and to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they will profane it.

Ezek. 7:22 ‘I will also turn My face from them, and they will profane My secret place; then robbers will enter and profane it.

Ezek. 7:23 ‘Make the chain, for the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence.

Ezek. 7:24 ‘Therefore, I will bring the worst of the nations, and they will possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong ones cease, and their holy places will be profaned.

Ezek. 7:25 ‘When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none.

Ezek. 7:26 ‘Disaster will come upon disaster and rumor will be added to rumor; then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders.

Ezek. 7:27 ‘The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. According to their conduct I will deal with them, and by their judgments I will judge them. And they will know that I am the Lord.’”

- We'll summarize this section in 4 points
 - First, the Lord takes their strength to fight and defeat their enemies
 - In vs.14-15 He says the nation will meet Babylon for battle
 - But in the end, no one will go into battle

- Historically, this is exactly what happened
 - As the Babylonians approached Jerusalem, they killed every Jew who came against the army so that there was no army outside the walls
 - And within the city, the population withered away from famine
 - By the time the Babylonians entered the city, Israel had no strength left to fight
 - The Lord says this will happen because God will bring it to pass
- Secondly, the survivors will lack the strength of protection and comfort
 - They will be left like doves, exposed and defenseless and mourning
 - The experience will leave them limp
 - They will dress in rough sackcloth to indicate mourning
 - And they will proceed into the nations bearing shame for having been so utterly defeated and humbled
- Thirdly, the strength of their wealth will fail them
 - Ezekiel says in v.19 that the people will throw their gold and silver treasures on the ground
 - Gold and silver can't buy freedom from an army intent on conquest
 - And they can't buy food when there is no food to purchase
 - Moreover, the Lord says in v.20 that these precious objects were made from materials stolen from the temple
 - So the people of Israel stole the objects from the temple and used the materials to make idols and other objects for themselves
 - These objects were detestable to the Lord
 - So now He will act to make their contraband abhorrent to them
 - What they once treasured will become plunder for their enemies
 - In v.22 the Lord says He will allow robbers to plunder the temple

- After all, the Lord's own people had already profaned the place, so it was a small matter to allow Gentiles to do the same
- Fourthly and finally, the Lord will withdraw from Israel the strength of His counsel and protection
 - In the end, this was the only true source of strength in Israel
 - As the Lord Himself declared in the Law:

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deut. 7:7 “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Deut. 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Israel was nothing apart from the Lord's choice to make them strong for His name's sake
- But now the Lord is bringing that to an end for a time
- He says in v.23 make the chain, referring to the way the people were led into captivity
 - The Babylonians chained prisoners together, often using rings through the nose or elsewhere
 - They would be subjected to humiliation at the hands of Gentiles
 - And not just any Gentile nation, but the “worst” of the nations, Babylon, would occupy the land and the houses of Israel
- Through all this God would bring an end to Israel's pride and arrogance
 - Where before the Lord was long-suffering, waiting for the people of God to repent and cry out and willing to show mercy...
 - The time has passed for mercy
 - In v.25 the Lord says when they cry out in anguish for peace, there will be none
 - Disaster will follow disaster
- Perhaps worst of all, the people will suddenly want to hear from God

- In v.26 He says they will seek for a vision from a prophet or a word from the Lord, but there will be none
 - The Law will be lost from the priest and from the counsel of the elders
 - The people will have silence from the Lord
 - And even what He had revealed earlier will be taken from them
- They will lose the strength of knowing His counsel leaving them truly alone and without hope
 - Kings will mourn
 - The people will tremble
 - And all they receive will be according to what they themselves have done, the Lord says in v.27
 - So that after it comes upon them, they will know Who they offended
- I think these four steps are a general pattern for the Lord's discipline of His people
 - When we live in open rebellion to Him and His word, He waits patiently for our repentance
 - But when the time comes for Him to act, He moves in stages
 - First, He removes our protection from attack
 - Attacks come to test our heart and to awaken us to the error of our choices
 - If that doesn't work, He removes our comfort, those things we rely upon to compensate for the unfulfilling emptiness of our sin
 - He'll take our peace
 - He'll take our security and reputation
 - He'll take our possessions
 - He'll take away our pride
 - He will strip away those things that stand between us and obedience

- And if that doesn't work, He will move to our physical strength
 - He'll bring us ailments, weaknesses
 - He calls into question the permanence of this body hoping we'll give consideration to the eternal
 - Nothing leads a person to thinking about God and the eternal than coming face to face with the frailties of our own body
- Finally, if all else fails, the Lord will cut us off from the counsel of His people and His word
 - We find ourselves wandering in the desert spiritually
 - We will be left to the world's counsel absent the support of the church
 - Paul invokes this penalty in at least one occasion for the sinner in Corinth who was engaged in particularly offense sin
- While I don't believe this is a firm rule, I do see the pattern in scripture
 - For example, as the Lord chose to test Job, He followed this same pattern
 - First God permitted the spiritual attack from Satan
 - Secondly, He permitted the removal of Job's possessions
 - Thirdly, He permitted Job to experience physical weaknesses
 - Finally, the Lord removed His counsel for a time, causing Job to turn to three clueless friends for counsel
 - God brought these things to Job because he was obedient, but He may do similar things to those children who are disobedient
 - Like we said there's a hard way to learn, and an easy way
 - The easy way is to take full advantage of the Lord's mercy and long-suffering patience by repenting before these things come to pass
 - Or even after they have started, bring them to an end by seeking forgiveness
 - Don't force the Lord's hand