

“The End Has Come”
Ezekiel 7:1-27
January 11, 2009

INTRODUCTION:

If you have a hard time enduring the disapproval of others, you would not do well as a prophet. The message God told them to bring was not a popular one. Many prophets brought an announcement that said, “Repent, for the end is near.” People usually don’t like to be told to repent because it means that they are doing something wrong. But that was not Ezekiel’s message; his was even more unpopular. “It’s too late to repent, for the end has already come.” Note the repetition in the first seven verses of our chapter of the words *end* and *come*. **“An end! The end has come... Now the end is upon you”** (v. 2-3). The word *end* occurs five times and the word *come* seven times.

The end Ezekiel is talking about is the end of Jerusalem and its beloved temple. Let’s review again the place where this event fits within the history of the Old Testament. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived as strangers in the land God promised them. Then the entire clan moved to Egypt under the leadership of Jacob’s son, Joseph. They stayed there for 400 years until Pharaoh enslaved them and mistreated them so severely that they cried out to God for deliverance. God sent Moses to do that, and under his leadership they left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of their unbelief. Joshua succeeded Moses and led them into the Promised Land, where they were led by a series of judges for 300 years. They asked for a king, and God gave them a united monarchy for only 120 years, led by three kings who each reigned for forty years—Saul, David and Solomon. The nation split after Solomon into north and south. The northern kingdom, Israel, had nothing but bad kings until the Assyrians conquered them in 722 B.C. Judah, the southern kingdom, had some bad kings and some good ones, until they were conquered by the Babylonians in a series of conquests beginning in 597 and ending in the complete destruction of the city and temple in 586 B.C. Ezekiel, along with King Jehoiachin and other leading citizens, were taken into exile in 597. As Ezekiel and his fellow Jews were living in conditions of great hardship in Babylon, they were thinking the same thing we all think when something disastrous happens. We think, “Hopefully, these difficulties will be short-lived and we will soon return to normal life.” In this case, they were hoping for a quick return to Jerusalem where they could resume their familiar lives. But it was not to be. Ezekiel’s message was that their exile would not be brief, and there would be nothing to return to anyway. Jerusalem and its temple were gone, destroyed by their enemies the Babylonians out of God’s judgment.

The Bible uses such events as the destruction of Jerusalem to teach about God’s judgment, particularly the eternal judgment of hell. There is another end beyond the one Ezekiel mentions, and it is the ultimate end. Back in 2003, a survey found that 64% of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die, while less than 1% think

they might go to hell. Many, of course, reject the whole idea of God's judgment. But those who accept the authority of the Bible have to let it speak to us and direct us, especially when we find it troublesome. This is one of those troublesome cases where we need to allow the Bible to instruct us about God's judgment. Notice four qualities of his judgment from this passage.

I. God-Glorifying

There is a significant phrase that is repeated seven times in Ezekiel 6-7. God announces that he will bring judgment and then says, **"Then you will know that I am the Lord"** (6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27). God's judgment is a necessary part of his being God. To deny God's judgment is to deny God himself. We sometimes think that pre-modern people all endorsed enthusiastically the idea of divine judgment, while those living in our modern and enlightened era have moved past the need for a God of judgment. But the Bible is clear in teaching that the denial of divine judgment is not a modern issue, but a fallen issue. That is, we don't like the idea of God's judgment not because we are modern, but because we are fallen, sinful creatures.

Ezekiel's hearers also rejected his teaching on God's judgment. They were hoping for a quick return to Jerusalem from their exile, and didn't want to hear his message that there was no Jerusalem to return to. The same was the case with Jeremiah. He was a contemporary of Ezekiel's, but was located back in Jerusalem instead of in exile in Babylon. His message from God was that the Babylonians would succeed and Jerusalem would be destroyed. The response of those who heard him was not to receive his prophetic word with faith, but to reject both the message and the messenger, throwing Jeremiah into a deep hole in the ground to die with maximum suffering.

Why is the idea of God's judgment so commonly rejected? Because the judgment of God puts teeth in the authority of God, and it is characteristic of our sinful nature that we don't want God's authority. Think about it for a moment. Is there any authority without judgment? What would happen if all our traffic laws were kept in place, but all enforcement was terminated? No parking, speeding, DUI or any other traffic law would ever be enforced again. We all know that the laws would cease to have any authority and would become suggestions instead. The reason we don't like God's judgment is that we don't like God's authority. And the reason we don't like God's authority is that we prefer that our own authority be ultimate. But it is not. God's authority is more ultimate than the law of gravity, and we deny that authority when we deny his judgment to even greater ill effect than denying the law of gravity.

II. Destructive

God's judgment is spoken of throughout the Bible by use of a word that means destruction. So Jesus speaks of people being destroyed in hell. The Greek word used by Jesus is the word *apollumi*, and its meaning is not to be annihilated out of existence, but to be destroyed in the sense of ruined or totaled. If your car is totaled, that means that it can no longer be used as a car. Its intended purpose as a means of transport has come to an end. The car still exists, but not as a car. When people renounce the authority of God over their lives, they are ruined just as much as a car hitting a concrete wall at sixty miles per hour. The use for which they have been designed will never again be realized. We have been designed for joyful submission to and worship of God. We destroy ourselves for that purpose when we renounce God.

When people mutiny against God's authority, the natural course is for everything to fall apart. This chapter describes in graphic detail what that falling apart looks like for the city of Jerusalem. The categories of abundance, wealth and preeminence will become meaningless, because everything will be leveled (v. 11). Daily commerce will cease. **"Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn"** (v. 12). It was a common feature of commerce in this culture for the buyer to walk away after his purchase celebrating his good bargain, while the seller would pretend that he had been taken advantage of, no doubt to prepare for maximizing the price of a future sale. Silver and gold become worthless because **"Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord"** (v. 19). He is speaking of the siege of Jerusalem, when money becomes worthless. If there is no food to be had, then it doesn't matter how much money one has. The people and structures that give support to life shall also cease. **"They seek a vision from the prophet, while the law perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders. The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair"** (v. 26-27).

III. Self-Chosen

The common view of hell is that people get sent there kicking and screaming, begging God not to do so. When the door to hell is opened to throw in another victim, all these screaming voices are heard from those already there crying out to be released from that place. The view of the Bible is different from that. Hell is where people go by their own choice. It is the logical outcome of a life that doesn't want God in that life. Hell is when God gives people what they want. There is an aspect of God's judgment as God simply allowing things to take their natural course. Notice the language of this in our chapter. The word for "end" in the repeated phrase **"the end has come"** is one that is commonly used to describe a ripe harvest. It is the end of a natural process. Notice, too, the phrase in verse 10: **"pride has budded."**

So Israel wanted their idols, and God gave them their idols. We read in the previous chapter, **"And you shall know that I am the Lord, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill"** (6:13). God gave them what they wanted—life with their idols—and they died there because the idols were unable to deliver them. We see in chapter 7 this same idea of judgment taking the

form of God giving people over to what they want. Two common sins in Israel were idolatry leading to violence. So in verse 23 we read, **“For the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence.”** They had chosen violence, and God gives them violence in the form of an invasion by the Babylonian army. Judgment is self-chosen.

J. I. Packer writes this about hell. “Scripture sees hell as self-chosen... Hell appears as God’s gesture of respect for human choice. All receive what they actually choose, either to be with God forever, worshipping him, or without God forever, worshipping themselves.” I had a neighbor back in Maryland whom I talked with several times about the Lord. As we were talking about heaven one day and the basis for his hope of getting there, he said these words to me. “I’m the nicest guy I know, and if God doesn’t want me in heaven, I don’t want to be there.” Think about heaven and hell like this: it’s the end of the path you’re walking right now. If your path is self-centered, then you will be allowed to follow that path to its natural end. It is an end in isolation. If your path is God-centered, then you will follow that path to its natural end, which leads to eternal life in heaven. Heaven, you see, is a God-centered place, and those who are self-centered don’t want to be there.

In an article he wrote on the importance of hell, Tim Keller talks about a man he once spoke to who said that talk about the fires of hell simply didn’t scare him. It seemed too far-fetched, even silly to him. So Tim Keller says that he read him the following lines from C. S. Lewis.

Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others... but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God ‘sending us’ to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud.

The man understood and responded, “Now that scares me to death.” I know what he means. It scares me too. If God simply gives me what I want, then I need to look at my own heart and ask, “What do I really want?”

IV. Unstoppable

Ezekiel is clear that the judgment of God, once it comes, is unstoppable. The most powerful human resource available has always been a nation’s army. Judah musters its army, but it cannot stop God’s judgment in the form of the Babylonians coming to defeat them. **“They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but none goes to battle”** (v. 14). The doom of judgment is inescapable, for **“the sword is without; pestilence and famine are within”** (v. 15). If they choose to leave the walls of Jerusalem, the sword awaits them. If they stay, pestilence and famine await them. Once they realize the inevitability of their doom **“All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water”** (v. 17). Most of the commentators recommend

a different translation for verse 17. The idea is that of water running down the knees. In other words, their fear will be so great that they will pee in their pants.

I think one of the more powerful images of the unstoppable nature of God's judgment is the statement in verse 27, where it says **"The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land are paralyzed by terror."** When you see the king mourning and the prince wrapped in despair, you know things are not good. Imagine turning on the television and seeing the president of the United States making a statement about nuclear missiles that have been launched and are heading for our nation. He says with a look of panic on his face that there is nothing he can do and advises people to seek refuge wherever they can find it, though he doesn't have any idea where that might be. When the king panics, things can't be good.

So the judgment of God is unstoppable. Or is it? Though this passage seems to describe judgment without any relief, there is something here that is both surprising and full of hope. In verse 22, we read these words describing what the Babylonians are going to do when they enter the city of Jerusalem. **"They shall profane my treasured place. Robbers shall enter and profane it."** He's talking about the temple, the place where God had chosen to dwell with his people. He is saying that it will be destroyed. At first glance, that seems simply to be another piece of bad news. But when we read the New Testament, we come across Jesus saying these words. **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"** (John 2:19). John wants to make sure his readers get the point, so he adds that Jesus **"was speaking about the temple of his body."** Jesus is the temple, God dwelling with us. And God destroyed this temple when Jesus hung on the cross. The good news of the gospel is that the judgment of God was spent when he destroyed the perfect temple, Jesus. Now all those who trust in him will be delivered from God's judgment. The way to escape the judgment of God is not by denying it, but by receiving it fully and seeing and trusting Jesus as our deliverer.

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with two applications. First, what trajectory is your life on, a self-centered one or a God-centered one? God will give you what you seek. The application of that is to be afraid. That's how Jesus applied it. He said to his disciples, **"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"** (Matt. 10:28). Remember that Jesus was talking to men some of whom would die horribly, being tortured, skinned and burned alive, sawn in half. Yet that is a picnic at the beach compared to hell.

Second, let yourself be amazed at the love of God that he would endure this hell in your place. Nothing magnifies the love of God more than the judgment of God. Jesus endured hell in our place.