

Ezekiel Chapters 5 through 7 - John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson "What God's judgment means to believers and non-believers".
  - a) We have three chapters in this lesson, and all three deal with God judging Israel.
  - b) If you recall from the last lesson, Ezekiel began his ministry in Chapter 3. God told him to be quiet and visually act out judgment against Jerusalem for its sins of disobedience.
  - c) Obviously it is not the city itself that sinned, but the Jewish residents. The sin was about corporately ignoring God and turning to idolatry.
  - d) I also want to give a quick reminder about the purpose of these lessons. I don't go into great detail about some of the details of these punishments as it is pretty obvious by the text. As one of my bible teacher mentors used to say, "Who cares about the Amorites, Hittites and Perizzites, what about my problems?" That is why I focus these lessons more on what these verses teach us about our lives than just giving a history lesson on Israel.
2. What is important to grasp for Christians is that God judges both believers and nonbelievers.
  - a) If we have committed our lives to serving God and we accept Jesus' payment for our sins, then God wants us to be good witnesses for Him. What God specifically calls us to do is an individual thing, but we are judged by God both as individuals and as groups.
  - b) How are we judged? God could "end" our church or the effectiveness of our church. God can end a civilization (or its effectiveness) for being a bad witness for Him.
  - c) So if things go wrong, how do we know God is behind it, as opposed to say, bad luck? We don't know. What we have to accept is God may be behind the scenes controlling the "strings". The point is we don't know for sure if a bad thing is God's judgment or just something God allowed to happen! In a sense, it doesn't matter because we have to deal with the bad situation, learn from it and move on.
  - d) Notice I have not even touched the issue of eternal salvation. One's eternal salvation is an individual thing based on our trust in Jesus as Lord. With that said, God does "judge" our behavior as God calls those who believe in Him to live their lives as "Witnesses" for Him.
    - i) The most famous biblical example of this in the New Testament is when God ended the life of a believing couple for lying to the church. (See Acts Chapter 5.)
  - e) As I like to joke, the good news of knowing your bible is you or I can draw much closer to God, knowing what He requires of us. The bad news is as we learn, God also holds us more accountable for what we have learned!
  - f) Getting back to the sins of Israel, their main sin in this lesson is about collectively ignoring God and turning to "idols". Their sins grew worse and worse to a point where God is now saying "I've had enough" and all of Israel was going to have to suffer for corporate disobedience. The key is not to read Ezekiel as a history lesson, but to read it in fear of our own lives and how we should live for God.
  - g) Finally, let me say something about unbelievers. First of all, that means being sent to hell. One would think anything over and above that is "piling on". If anything God often allows the nonbelievers to benefit in this lifetime, if for no other reason as that is the only life they will ever receive for all of eternity.
    - i) These chapters don't focus a lot on the sins of nonbelievers. We will get to the fate of nonbelievers when we discuss the nations surrounding Israel in a few lessons. Right now, the focus is on believers themselves.
  - h) What I want the reader of this lesson to get out of it, is not a history lesson of Israel, but a reminder that God judges all believers based on whether or not we were loyal to what God calls us to do. In other words, God calls believers to live the "Christian life". Failure to do so can cause us to lose our "witness" for God to those around us.
  - i) On that happy note, we can start the lesson. ☺

3. Chapter 5, Verse 1: "Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair.
  - a) In Chapter 4, we had Ezekiel doing a handful of different visual demonstrations to show the coming judgment on the nation of Israel and in particular, Jerusalem.
  - b) Remember that Ezekiel was already taken captive and is living in Babylon. Ezekiel is mainly speaking to the other Israelites who were in captivity with Ezekiel.
  - c) As of this chapter, the City of Jerusalem is still standing and has not yet been captured.
  - d) Here in Verse 1 of Chapter 5, Ezekiel has one more silent, visual demonstration before he actually is told to speak to the Israelites living in Babylon. Ezekiel is told to shave his head and his beard. He is told to take a set of scales and divide up the hairs in groups.
4. Verse 2: When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. <sup>3</sup> But take a few strands of hair and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. <sup>4</sup> Again, take a few of these and throw them into the fire and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel.
  - a) If you recall, God told Ezekiel to lie on his side for a total of 430 days. (That was 390 days lying on one side facing one direction and another 40 days lying on Ezekiel's other side facing the opposite direction.) In Verse 2 God gives Ezekiel something new to do once that 430-day period has ended.
  - b) In Verse 1 of this chapter, God told Ezekiel to cut off all of his hair to make a point. In Verse 2, Ezekiel is told to take a third of the hair and burn it within the city.
    - i) In the last lesson, Ezekiel was told to make a model of the City of Jerusalem. The model was to include that city being under attack.
    - ii) Now Ezekiel is told to burn one third of his hair "inside" this city model.
    - iii) What does it mean? It means roughly a third of the residents of Jerusalem will be killed in the city. Remember the city will be under attack and Ezekiel is saying that when the Babylonians (the ones attacking Jerusalem) finally destroy the city, one third of the residents will die.
    - iv) Stop and let that sink in for a moment. God is telling Ezekiel that an invading army will win and one third of the residents will be killed. I'm sure Ezekiel's audience had friends and family in that city. Further, Jerusalem had God's "tabernacle". Yet despite all of this Ezekiel is predicting death and destruction.
  - c) In the second sentence, another "third" of Ezekiel's hair is to be cut down with a sword. This means a third of the Israelites will be killed while trying to escape.
  - d) The final third was "scattered to the wind". The next sentence says I (God) will pursue them with a drawn sword. In other words, God is saying some will escape the fighting, but the army will pursue them and they will die trying to escape.
  - e) Those who suffer and die include children as well as adults. This gets back to the issue of the innocent suffering with the guilty as they are part of the same group. There were probably a religious minority in Jerusalem that was loyal to God. Despite that fact, all were going to suffer.
  - f) Verse 4 is a little different. God tells Ezekiel not to eliminate all his hair by fire or sword, but to keep a few select hairs Ezekiel is to throw in the fire. Ezekiel then says the fire from those hairs will spread to all of Israel.
    - i) If one recalls from past lessons, the word "fire" does not necessarily mean death. The idea is that one is "refined" the same way metal is refined of its impurities by being heated very hot, one can remove the impurities from say silver or gold.
    - ii) What is important to understand is that it is not just the Jews living in Jerusalem (the capital) that will be destroyed, but those living all over Israel.
  - g) The rest of the chapter gets into the "why" issue, so we'll move on from here.

5. Verse 5: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. <sup>6</sup> Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees.
- a) Here we have the first time Ezekiel actually speaks out about God's promised punishment against Jerusalem. For at least the last 430 days Ezekiel has worked in silence, starving himself, working with a model of Jerusalem. I'm sure the local Israelites living in Babylon near Ezekiel must have thought of him as some sort of nut who goes around doing strange demonstrations as opposed to just working for a living.
  - b) With that said, let's discuss Ezekiel's opening words and what that meant historically and what it means to us today:
    - i) The first sentence says, "This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her."
    - ii) The word "this" refers to the model of Jerusalem that Ezekiel is working with as well as the real Jerusalem in Israel.
  - c) Ok, ponder this question: Why did God pick out the Israelites to be "His" people? If it was just to bring in the Messiah why establish a nation first? One reason God chose a nation to bring in the Messiah was to maximize the evidence to show Jesus as the promised King. The Old Testament, completed long before Jesus was born, is filled with clues about every aspect of the life of the promised Messiah (king).
    - i) Back to the question, "Was Jesus the only purpose of the Nation of Israel?" The answer is no. God wanted a set of people to be His witnesses to the surrounding nations that "God is the only god". Jerusalem was the center of worship for this set of people. Just as today, God has "His people" who are part of "His kingdom" scattered around the world, so at this time, God called the nation of Israel to be His people and His witnesses to the world around them.
  - d) Now comes Verse 6: "Yet in her (Israelites) wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees."
    - i) The key word is "more". In other words, the sin of the nation of Israel at this time was that they ignored God even more than the countries around Israel.
    - ii) What did God mean by that? It meant that Israel at this time worshipped false gods, but so did other nations around Israel. It refers to how much they have sinned. It meant the Israelites turned to worthless idols even more than their neighbors. It also means the foreign nations were more loyal to their false gods than Israel was to the true God.
    - iii) What does any of this have to do with our lives? It gets back to the idea that God holds us accountable. Are Christians subject to the "Law" of the Old Testament? No, but we are accountable to God to be a good witness for Him in all that we do and we too, individually or collectively can suffer for the failure to be His witness at any given time.
6. Verse 7: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you.
- a) At this point, I envision Ezekiel yelling at the Israelites in shouting distance. Remember that Ezekiel was silent for well over a year. I'm sure he was a daily spectacle to those passing by him in this town in the Babylonian Empire. Now all of sudden, Ezekiel is speaking out and he is condemning the Israelites for being worse sinners than those of surrounding nations including other people that are part of this Babylonian Empire.

- b) The condemnation is for not keeping God's laws and for the Israelites having a lower standard of morality than even the surrounding nations.
    - i) Israel was not the only nation that had a set of rules for "do's and don'ts". I'm sure other countries had laws about paying respect to their gods. Yet, Israel ignored the decrees of the true gods while the nations around them still followed the rules of the false gods around them.
  - c) What's the application? There are those today who are more loyal to what is false than those claiming to follow the true God but don't follow through on that claim!
7. Verse 8: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations.<sup>9</sup> Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again.
- a) Up to Verse 7, we just had God speaking through Ezekiel telling the Israelites how wrong they were for ignoring God. Beginning here in Verse 8, we get the description of the actual punishment that God will inflict upon the Israelites.
  - b) Verse 8 is God announcing He will punish Jerusalem in the site of all the nations. Because the Israelites have turned to false gods, God will do something to them that God promises "He has never done before and will never do again".
  - c) If you study the history of the nation of Israel, there have been other times in history where they have suffered horrible tragedies at the hands of enemies. Yet somehow, God says that He will never again do what He is doing at this point. With that said, what is unique about this punishment? The answer is Israel had a bad problem with idolatry. There is no time in the history of Israel since then that they had this issue. The one thing the Babylonian captivity did was cure was the corporate turning of Israel away from false gods that existed in that era at that time. That factor is unique in their history.
  - d) What does that mean to us? If there is a time a nation that calls itself Christian corporately (i.e., as a whole) turns away from God to other "worthless idols", yes we too can suffer the same sort of fate.
  - e) We're also starting to see here an issue that God has to deal with: God needs to punish Israel as He cannot tolerate them being a bad witness for Him. At the same time, God still needs to preserve the nation as His witnesses. It is the dilemma of wanting to punish someone who is bad, but at the same time let others around them know that God is still in charge and these are still His chosen people! This gets back to being a good witness for God and what are the consequences. God does punish His followers when we fail to be His witnesses to the world around us.
8. Verse 10: Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds.<sup>11</sup> Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you.<sup>12</sup> A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword.
- a) If you think the verses so far are tough, read these three verses carefully. In Verse 10, God is saying the famine will be so bad that people will eat their own family members. This is not about murder, but about eating dead bodies for nutrition.
  - b) Now let's skip to Verse 12 for a moment: It repeats the idea that one third of Jerusalem will die by plague (disease) or famine, another third will die by the sword of the attacking nation and the final third will be scattered and "pursued" with the drawn sword.
  - c) Imagine if you are an Israelite hearing all of this. Even if you think you are personally guilty of these crimes, what about their children? Does God allow the innocent to suffer for the sake of the guilty? Yes that is the case in these verses.

- d) Is it fair that God allows the innocent to suffer? It would be unfair if there was no "judgment day", and this life was all that there is. Remember the issue is about being a good witness for God. Failure to do so has a heavy price of punishment.
  - e) Now let's go back to Verse 11 for a moment: "because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices". One of the crimes committed was that the Israelites ignored the worship practices that God ordained by Moses. The sanctuary was filled with "vile images" (i.e., images of false gods) and the practices that go along with those images. In other words, the leadership in Israel was guilty and now everybody is going to have to suffer due to the mistakes made by the leadership. Don't think all of Jerusalem was any less guilty than its leaders. Often, leaders just "reflect" what people want to hear and practice, just as there are many "bad" churches today that simply reflect what people want to hear as opposed to God's truth.
  - f) OK, by this point in the lesson, we should all be scared to death. ☹ This section of scripture is a heavy condemnation. If there is an overriding theme, it is that "God is in charge, whether people want to accept it or not". For most people, that realization doesn't come until "judgment day". A point of this lesson is God will often not wait that long. Sometimes God does things to get the attention of a "group" to get us to turn to Him.
9. Verse 13: "Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal.
- a) Verse 13 shows that God's anger is not permanent. The purpose of this angry demonstration is not to destroy the nation of Israel completely but to get those that survive to turn from their bad practices and turn back to God.
  - b) There is a saying that goes, "God won't His people get away with anything". If you have committed your life to God, notice how when we do something wrong, we can't get away with it the same way a nonbeliever does! Take that as a good sign that God cares about our lives and is disciplining us to follow Him better.
  - c) As bad as all of this is, it is still better to face God's wrath in this lifetime and be a "better believer" than to ignore God all of one's life and suffer the eternal consequences.
  - d) Getting back to the verse, the point is the Israelites will know that God is behind this and those that survive will become a better nation that follows God's laws. The underlying point is that God disciplines those who follow Him in order to keep them close to Him.
10. Verse 14: "I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. <sup>15</sup> You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke. I the LORD have spoken. <sup>16</sup> When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food. <sup>17</sup> I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I the LORD have spoken."
- a) Some might think the first 13 verses of this chapter is enough of a warning. Ezekiel goes on and on describing God's wrath and promised punishment. Why is Ezekiel so tough? The answer is God, through Ezekiel wants the Israelites to understand that God is behind this punishment and there is nothing these Israelites can do to avoid it.
  - b) The point here is the "bad times are going to get worse and worse for awhile". Even the other nations around Israel will say, "Wow, their god must really be angry at them". In other words, a point of the punishment is not just because the Israelites were disobedient, but so the other nations will know that God is in charge and demands obedience.
  - c) In summary, most of Jerusalem will not survive this attack. God is describing different ways Jerusalem will be destroyed due to their failure to be His witness to the world.

- d) I can describe in details how the pain of war, famine, and other causes will cause this nation to suffer. What would be more beneficial is to explain how this affects us:
- i) Suppose you or I are going through a tough time emotional, physically, or even financially. It may get worse before it gets better. You and I are not privileged to God's plans for our lives. Sometimes suffering may be some sort of punishment but often it for other reasons. God may want to teach us something so we can draw closer to Him or we can comfort others going through similar things.
  - ii) The point is we should not assume that hard times are God inflicting His wrath upon us. It may be a possibility and that is not to be ignored. To me, "why" something bad is happening is not as important as the lessons we are to learn from such experiences. If there is some sin in our lives, then it is to be examined and worked on to be eliminated. If it is due to say, tough economic times, then we are to let God lead us down "different paths" for financial survival. If we are suffering physically, we are to trust God to help us get through such times and know that such times are "at worse" only for this lifetime.
11. Chapter 6, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, set your face against the mountains of Israel; prophesy against them
- a) By this verse, God has "given up" speaking to the Israelites and is now going to talk to the "land of Israel" itself. It is a poetic way of saying, "Since the Israelites won't listen to me, I God, will speak to someone who will listen, that is the physical land itself." It is not the ground is capable of understanding Ezekiel. It is a poetic way of saying, "Since you (Israelites) won't listen to me, I'll speak to "someone or something" that will listen. Therefore, we have this poetic speech given to the land as opposed to people.
12. Verse 3: and say: `O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: I am about to bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. <sup>4</sup> Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will slay your people in front of your idols. <sup>5</sup> I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. <sup>6</sup> Wherever you live, the towns will be laid waste and the high places demolished, so that your altars will be laid waste and devastated, your idols smashed and ruined, your incense altars broken down, and what you have made wiped out. <sup>7</sup> Your people will fall slain among you, and you will know that I am the LORD.
- a) One has to remember the land of Israel became polluted by this idol worship. When the Jewish people worshipped false gods, it was not just something they did in their homes or in synagogues. There were places in the land of Israel where symbols to these false gods were set up. If you know your Old Testament, there are references in the books of Kings and Chronicles to "high places". These were places where false idols were set up to worship. This was a problem since the nation of Israel was first formed. It was based on idolatry practices of other nations and continued by the Israelites.
  - b) This leads us to the text of these verses. God is saying these (high places) altars will be destroyed and people will die in front of these idols. Think of it this way: When all of this destruction was happening in Israel, I am sure many people ran to these false gods asking for protection during the Babylonian invasion. God is promising that not only these false gods won't save them, but their altars will be destroyed along with the people worshipping at these altars.
  - c) What God is trying to get across in these verses is that the "false idols" will not survive this attack as well as the people living in Israel. The land itself will be cleaned of idolatry as well as the fall of the people who worshipped such idols.
  - d) OK John, I get the idea that Israel is being destroyed and the land is being removed of all of its idols. What does any of this have to do with my life? Know that God does not allow dual worship in our lives. We cannot depend on God and something else as well.

- i) Does this mean we cannot have hobbies? No. It means we cannot trust in God for our protection and something else. That "something else" could be anything from another religion to trusting in our finances to trusting in doctors. It is good to have savings and friends for help. My point is we look to God first and only for our protection and then we let God work through people and situations around us in order to make a difference in our lives. (See Matthew 6:24 on this point.)
- e) Meanwhile, the nation of Israel is still in a lot of trouble as Ezekiel is reminding us. ☹
13. Verse 8: "But I will spare some, for some of you will escape the sword when you are scattered among the lands and nations. <sup>9</sup> Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me--how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. <sup>10</sup> And they will know that I am the LORD; I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them.
- a) In these three verses, God is saying, some Jewish people will live through this event. Those that survive will live for a period of time in other nations. Not all of the Israelites are relocated to Babylon. Some fled to Egypt and assumedly some fled elsewhere. The point is the Jewish people will not be united as a nation again, until the 70 years of captivity is over. The Israelites will not have self-rule again, for over 2,000 years.
- b) Notice this phrase in Verse 9: "Those who escape will remember me." The point is even though the Israelites will no longer be a nation, those that live will still remember that they serve the "true God". God puts it in their hearts to still be obedient to Him despite the disaster that happens. Yes, they still have to deal with idolatry and the Israelites will realize that the idolatry was the problem. Let's not lose sight of the fact that God still has His "hand" on His chosen people and they still believe in God despite the punishment.
- i) How does that relate to us? When God punishes those who believe in Him, God does not take away our desire to serve Him. The point is to clean us of our bad habits and God never takes away our desire to be His people!
- c) The rest of Verse 9 says in effect the Israelites who survive will "loathe themselves" for what they have done. That means they will still desire to serve God and they will reflect correctly on what they did wrong and turn from other gods.
- d) Verse 10 is also an important point: It says in effect, "God says what He means and He means what He says". If God threatens punishment for disobedience, that threat is no good unless God is willing to follow through with that punishment. God was and is, willing to follow through on punishments against His own people for disobedience as laid out in the bible (e.g., like stated in Leviticus 26 as discussed in the last lesson).
- e) Back to "us": Why would we want to serve a God who could and would punish us like this? The answer is to consider the alternative! If God "is" god, then what choice do we have? The point is we desire God's blessings on our lives, then we also have to accept God's discipline when He is working to draw us closer to Him.
14. Verse 11 (part one): "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out "Alas!
- a) Remember that Ezekiel was a silent prophet for well over a year. Now notice how Ezekiel is told to make every effort to get the attention of the Israelites around Him! God is telling Ezekiel to strike his hands, stomp his feet and cry out. In other words, God wants Ezekiel to make every effort to get their attention.
- b) If all of this punishment is "set", what is the purpose of the warnings?
- i) For starters, those living in Babylon are not part of the direct punishment of the destruction of Jerusalem and the idols all over the land. The Israelites living in Babylon are in a sense the "lucky ones" in that they don't have to experience this!
- ii) Next, God wants the survivors to understand the purpose of this punishment so that they learn from it and don't repeat their idolatry practices.

15. Verse 11 (cont.): because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague. <sup>12</sup> He that is far away will die of the plague, and he that is near will fall by the sword, and he that survives and is spared will die of famine. So will I spend my wrath upon them. <sup>13</sup> And they will know that I am the LORD, when their people lie slain among their idols around their altars, on every high hill and on all the mountaintops, under every spreading tree and every leafy oak--places where they offered fragrant incense to all their idols. <sup>14</sup> And I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land a desolate waste from the desert to Diblah--wherever they live. Then they will know that I am the LORD.' "
- a) It's time to pause for a moment and realize how horrible all of this is. Today we deal with economic problems and some deal with physical and mental issues. As bad as that is, imagine most people around us dying due to "sword, famine and plague".
  - b) With that said, notice the beginning of Verse 13, which says, "And they will know that I am the LORD".
    - i) The question is if most of them are dead, how will they know that God is "Lord"? A big answer is "judgment day". The nation of Israel was guilty of turning their collective back on God and turning toward "worthless idols".
    - ii) My point is, no matter how bad things may be in our life right now, we should remember we are not under this judgment. Jesus has paid the price for our sins, and we as believers in Christ will not suffer this "collective fate". Remember the sin at hand is about a nation of people who have turned their collective backs on God. This is God saying in effect, "I've had enough" and "My people will know that I am God whether they want to admit it or not".
  - c) OK, what does all of this destruction mean for you and me? First of all, it is a reminder to keep on trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins no matter what is happening to the world around us! Next, it is a reminder that God is in charge and those who turn from Him will pay the ultimate price. Does all of this stuff scare me personally? Very much so, to the point where I never want to face the wrath of God in any situation! It scares me enough that I want to share the Gospel with those around me and warn of the ultimate fate of those who turn from God.
  - d) Back to the text. The last verse says that "(I, God will) make the land a desolate waste from the desert to Diblah--wherever they live. Then they will know that I am the LORD.
    - i) This is God saying in effect that He has had enough of Israel's corporate disobedience to Him and the entire land of Israel will be empty of the Jewish population for (what we know from Jeremiah was) seventy years.
    - ii) What about the phrase, "Then they will know that I am the LORD"?
      - a) A partial answer is that this verse is for the Jewish people who survive this calamity and as a reminder for them to turn back to God.
      - b) A partial answer is those Jews who have completely turned their backs on God will know "He" is in charge for all of eternity.
      - c) A partial answer is that God repeats this phrase a lot in Ezekiel to remind the reader that God is in charge, whether we like it or not.
  - e) I would like to go "off course" for a moment and talk a little about what the "Promised Land" means to Christian believers:
    - i) First of all, I do believe in a literal land of Israel as the Promised Land. That land of Israel was promised to the descendants of Abraham and that is "their land".
    - ii) With that said, I want to talk about what the "Promised Land" means in a spiritual sense: It is about fully trusting in God for every aspect of our lives no matter what is happening!
    - iii) I don't believe the "Promised Land" represents heaven, as when the Israelites entered the land, there were still wars to fight. I don't believe there are any more fights left for us to fight when we get to heaven.

- iv) The "Promised Land" is about fully trusting in God to get us through whatever is the problem and the situation of the moment. It is about knowing that God has a plan for our lives and wants to guide us through whatever we are going through.
  - v) It is about letting go of worrying, but at the same time taking footsteps to deal with the issues at hand, as God can only guide us if we are moving!
  - vi) In a "spiritual sense", the Promised Land is not a specific location on this planet where one never has any problems. The Promised Land is a state of mind where one is fully trusting in God for the outcome!
    - a) With that said, can we be "kicked out" of the Promised Land for a while? Sure, every time we stay up late worrying and not trust God, we are for the moment, being "kicked out" of the Promised Land and have to stay out until we let go of our worries and learn to trust God through them.
  - vii) Before we jump back into Ezekiel, I thought it would be a good time to stop here for a quick prayer: "Father, like the Israelites of that day, we too, wander off course and turn from You to other things. Help us to remember that it is You and You only that rule over our lives. Help us to fully trust in You in good and bad times and realize that You alone are God. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.
  - f) Meanwhile, back to the destruction. ☺
16. Chapter 7, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel: The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. <sup>3</sup> The end is now upon you and I will unleash my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. <sup>4</sup> I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will surely repay you for your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.
- a) Chapter 7 does not add anything significantly new to the planned destruction of the land of Israel. If anything, Chapter 7 is a "poetic dirge" describing its destruction.
  - b) It's time to remember that when Ezekiel wrote this section of the book Jerusalem was still standing and none of this heavy judgment had begun yet.
    - i) Ezekiel is full of predictions that were fulfilled over the short term and others that are fulfilled over the long-term of history. The short-term predictions are the ones that validate Ezekiel as a prophet. That is what is in view in this lesson. When we get into later lessons in Ezekiel, we'll deal with some of his long-term predictions.
    - ii) Is Ezekiel writing to those about to die, or those Jews that will survive? The answer is both. The warning to those about to die is for them to repent of their sins before their own judgment day begins. For those who survive through this period, the message is still one of repentance, but also of knowing that God is in charge and God still cares for "His own" despite all of this punishment.
    - iii) On that happy note, we can now discuss Chapter 7. ☺
  - c) In Verse 1 of this "poetic dirge", God is announcing the end is coming "Upon the four corners of the land". In other words, all of Israel will be cleaned out of idolatry.
    - i) The verses say in effect that God will judge the Israelites according to the deeds they have done and will not spare them.
    - ii) It is like a good parent who has warned a child over and over again about some specific problem and now the parent has no choice left but to inflict some sort of strict punishment as the same problem is happening over and over again.
    - iii) Think of it this way: Suppose someone commits their life to serving God. Over a period of time, they turn away from that commitment. God needs to show that "He is God" whether people obey or not. Therefore, there has to be a point where God says in effect, "enough is enough", and if you people won't obey Me, then fine, you are out of here for awhile!

- d) Can a Christian reach a point of no return? This gets into the classical Christian debate of whether or not one can lose their salvation. Another way to express that same question is "What if someone truly gives their heart to God, and then eventually turns away from God with their lifestyle? Are such people still saved?
    - i) The way I reconcile this debate is the fact I can't read people's minds, I can only watch their behavior. I look if people are living for God based on how they live their lives and "judge their lives on earth" (not their salvation) based on how they live. (God alone determines who is saved, that's a point of Matthew 7:1-2).
  - e) With that said, can God judge Christians the same way He is judging the Israelites here in these verses? No, in the sense believers in God are not all united on a single piece of real estate. The answer is also yes, in the spiritual sense that we can lose the peace of God because we are focusing on our problems and not on Him!
  - f) Getting back to the verses (I've been wandering a lot from them in this lesson. ☺) This section ends with the phrase "Then you will know that I am the LORD".
    - i) If you haven't noticed by now, that phrase is repeated a lot in Ezekiel. Despite all of the "corporate rejection" by Israel and all of the announced punishments by God that commonly repeated phrase is stated over and over again. It is God's way of saying "I've had it with you people. I'm all done giving warnings and now comes judgment time for a lack of obedience".
    - ii) I have to admit I've skimmed lightly on the actual destruction of the people of this land and what happened historically. This is bad stuff and there is no denying it. My purpose of writing these lessons is not so much to learn history as to learn from history which is why I emphasize the modern comparisons so much.
  - g) Can God judge a country like the United States the same way He did Israel? Yes in the sense that the United States was set up on Judeo-Christian principals and a failure to follow those principals may mean the end of its influence as a nation for Him.
    - i) I don't see a "kick everybody out" type of judgment as the United States is not a literal promised land for believers only. However, God is more than capable of somehow punishing our country, or any country for collective disobedience.
17. Verse 5: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Disaster! An unheard-of disaster is coming. <sup>6</sup> The end has come! The end has come! It has roused itself against you. It has come! <sup>7</sup> Doom has come upon you--you who dwell in the land. The time has come, the day is near; there is panic, not joy, upon the mountains. <sup>8</sup> I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. <sup>9</sup> I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is I the LORD who strikes the blow.
- a) In case you've forgotten, we're still talking about the literal destruction of the nation of Israel in a "poetic dirge". Ezekiel is calling out that destruction is coming and it is too late for the Jewish people living in Israel to do anything about it.
  - b) The message being stated over and over again is God saying in effect, "My wrath is coming and it is too late for repentance. You, the people who claim to follow me, deserve what I am about to do to you. The destruction will be so severe, that you will realize that God is behind it and you can't just blame it on being attacked by the Babylonian army".
    - i) When things go wrong, we tend to blame our circumstances or the economy or just "bad luck". We fail to see God behind the scenes "pulling the strings". Israel at this point in its history had collectively turned from God and was "heavy" into idolatry. Yes, the destruction was at the hands of the Babylonians, but the destruction was so complete, there was no explanation other than God Himself was behind the scenes.

- c) Notice Verse 9 says, "I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you". Understand that this is deserved punishment.
  - d) One idea God is trying to get across is that "He is God, whether you like it not." God wants to show to the surrounding nations that He is God and failure to recognize Him and obey Him as God has eternal consequences.
18. Verse 10: "The day is here! It has come! Doom has burst forth, the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed! <sup>11</sup> Violence has grown into a rod to punish wickedness; none of the people will be left, none of that crowd--no wealth, nothing of value. <sup>12</sup> The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller grieve, for wrath is upon the whole crowd. <sup>13</sup> The seller will not recover the land he has sold as long as both of them live, for the vision concerning the whole crowd will not be reversed. Because of their sins, not one of them will preserve his life. <sup>14</sup> Though they blow the trumpet and get everything ready, no one will go into battle, for my wrath is upon the whole crowd.
- a) The "poetry" continues: In the first five books of the Bible there are specific warnings about disobedience. All of these predictions about punishment and destruction are God showing He keeps His word about the price to fail to honor Him as God. (See Leviticus Chapter 26 as an example of this topic.)
  - b) Verse 11 announces how complete will be this destruction upon the land. It states that no people will be left in the land. There will be no wealth, i.e., nothing of anything that is of value in this world. The idea is the "market" for anything will come to an end.
  - c) There is another idea that stems from teaching in Leviticus that comes to an end: In ancient Israel, one cannot buy or sell real estate like we do today. It is always leased for a set time and eventually returns to the original owner. (See Leviticus Chapter 25 and 27.)
    - i) I mention that point because the destruction is so complete, the point is being made a "land seller" cannot recover his land as he will not be there to recover it.
  - d) What God is trying to get across with these examples of "business dealings" is just how complete is this end to the nation of Israel during this period of captivity.
  - e) In the final verses of this paragraph, it discusses the idea that the Jewish people living there won't even have time to organize an army to defend the land.
  - f) Again my emphasis on these lessons is not about the history of Israel, but about what we can learn from this history and how to apply it to our lives.
    - i) Think of what a typical "nonbeliever" focuses their lives on today: The primary emphasis on making a living and supporting a family. Yes it is important, but it still should be second to one's relationship with God.
    - ii) God promises that one day the world will be brought to an end as we know it the same way Israel is brought to an end in this section of scripture.
19. Verse 15: "Outside is the sword, inside are plague and famine; those in the country will die by the sword, and those in the city will be devoured by famine and plague. <sup>16</sup> All who survive and escape will be in the mountains, moaning like doves of the valleys, each because of his sins. <sup>17</sup> Every hand will go limp, and every knee will become as weak as water. <sup>18</sup> They will put on sackcloth and be clothed with terror. Their faces will be covered with shame and their heads will be shaved. <sup>19</sup> They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be an unclean thing. Their silver and gold will not be able to save them in the day of the LORD's wrath. They will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it, for it has made them stumble into sin. <sup>20</sup> They were proud of their beautiful jewelry and used it to make their detestable idols and vile images. Therefore I will turn these into an unclean thing for them. <sup>21</sup> I will hand it all over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked of the earth, and they will defile it. <sup>22</sup> I will turn my face away from them, and they will desecrate my treasured place; robbers will enter it and desecrate it.
- a) Sometimes it is better to read this in large chunks to see the utter destruction being planned. Reading it this way, we can see what God has planned for them.

- b) The idea here is that those who survive will not survive well. Those who survive will lose whatever financial wealth they had in the first place.
  - c) Notice the last sentence of Verse 19: "They will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it, for it has made them stumble into sin."
    - i) The earlier verses were talking about people's wealth. In these verses, it is saying that their wealth causes them to stumble in their sin. What does that mean?
      - a) Think of all the people we know who care more about making money than they do about God. One's "sinful ways" begins when we begin to focus more on money than we do on God.
    - ii) Verse 20 says the Israelites used their wealth to make jewelry and idols.
      - a) As to jewelry, God is not anti-jewelry. (See Song of Songs 1:10.)
      - b) God is against making a living as a priority over living for Him.
      - c) As to idols, it shows that when people turn from God, it does not make them "unreligious". There is still an internal desire to worship something and people then turn to other worthless gods.
  - d) The idea of this whole section is to that the Israelites had gotten to a point where they cared more about making money and using that money to serve other Gods.
    - i) If that doesn't sound like "today", nothing does. While we don't make literal household idols today, people who do turn from God always turn to something else as we are built with an internal desire to worship something. That something may be financial success, fame or honor. The point is our society today is no better than the Israelites of that day.
  - e) If this is true, why doesn't God judge our country the same way today?
    - i) As best I can tell, God is waiting for as many people as possible to get saved before "wrapping it up". (See 2nd Peter 2:9 on that issue.) That is the only reason God is sparing His anger and waiting longer until He will say, "Ok, enough is enough!"
20. Verse 23: "Prepare chains, because the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of violence. <sup>24</sup> I will bring the most wicked of the nations to take possession of their houses; I will put an end to the pride of the mighty, and their sanctuaries will be desecrated. <sup>25</sup> When terror comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none. <sup>26</sup> Calamity upon calamity will come, and rumor upon rumor. They will try to get a vision from the prophet; the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders. <sup>27</sup> The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with despair, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the LORD."
- a) In this last "dirge", God is saying He will bring the most "wicked of nations" to come and take Israel captive. People will be looking for peaceful solutions but none will come. The destruction and planned punishment will continue with no peaceful compromise.
  - b) The Israelites will look in vein for ways to survive or at least live in peace, but will not find any such solutions.
  - c) Notice something said in Verse 27: "I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them."
    - i) There is "a" view (as opposed to "the" view) among some bible scholars that when judgment day comes, God will judge people by their own standards of right and wrong and show how they failed to live up to their own standards. Verse 27 is a support of that argument.
  - d) The chapter ends with the repeated phrase, "Then they will know that I am the LORD".
    - i) The point here is that those who ignore God will know on judgment day that God is in charge. There is no escaping such judgment.
    - ii) Now let's look at Verse 26 for a second. It says, "Calamity upon calamity will come, and rumor upon rumor. They will try to get a vision from the prophet; the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders."

- iii) This verse is teaching there is a point where it is too late to try to seek God for help, after a day of judgment has been pronounced.
  - iv) This verse is not teaching against seeking God. It is teaching that seeking God after judgment has been pronounced won't work. Let's put it this way: Suppose someone who died is now thinking, "I'm willing to change, give me some good Godly council". The point is there is a time when it is too late to change.
21. OK John, we've now had over 12 pages of doom and gloom. I'm pretty depressed. ☹
- a) The point is to see that God's judgment does come one day to all of us.
  - b) For those who don't put their trust in Jesus, the day of "judgment" is something to be feared. For those who do fear God, this section is a reminder to keep us on the "straight and narrow". It is also a reminder that when society "tragedies" do come, we have faith that God will see us through such times and preserve us for eternity.
  - c) The good news is that if we are trusting in Jesus for our salvation, we don't have to worry about all of this "destruction". Yes, our economy goes up and down and most of us have times in our lives when it looks like everything is falling apart. In such times, one has to remember that eternity is a lot longer than any suffering occurred in this lifetime.
  - d) I'm not sure that makes it any better, but when the world is "falling apart" remember that God is in charge and God is still trying to work out a plan for our lives, no matter how bad it may look at the present time.
22. Quick, let's pray before this lesson gets any worse. ☺ Father, we thank You for the eternal salvation You have given us. We thank You that You have spared us from the "next" coming destruction upon the world. In the meantime, help us through the difficult times in our lives and keep us close to You in our lives. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.