

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Ezekiel 7”

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With

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Ezekiel 7

Having performed a series of sign acts dramatizing the demise of Jerusalem and the temple in (Ezek 4-5) and explaining the justification for God's punishment (Ezek 6), in Ezekiel 7 the prophet tries to jolt the exiles with the reality of the impending doom. Ezekiel 7's main feature is its dramatic repetition of doom, a feature necessitated by the belief of many Israelites in the inviolability of Zion. Ezekiel disabuses his hearers of that myth in Chapter 7.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 116, Ezekiel 7. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you?

MSH: Very good Trey. How was your week?

TS: It was pretty good. I just wanted to update everyone real quick. I was taking a look at the numbers of the podcast and we've actually quadrupled our listenership over the last 12 months. Hopefully the next 12 months we can quadruple again so maybe the get naked podcast, everybody is reaching out to their friends. I know that everybody knows that one person they can talk to. I was talking to my friend Jeff, I want to give him a shout out, and how when you start talking to people about this kind of content, some people's eyes just gloss over and you slowly walk away because you know you're losing them. When you hear this content, people come to your mind immediately who you think this content would resonate with. We're really asking for those people out there who are listeners to go find those people in your church and family, wherever you are. I know you have one or two people in mind that would enjoy this content so let's try to get them on board and do some good things.

MSH: That's a good strategy. People have to remember that we have a very clear understanding that what we do here is not for everybody. Frankly, that's just the way I've operated for years. What I do, the things I write, things I'm focused on, this is not for the average churchgoer or the average person in the pew. That's fine. I'm not aiming or shooting for them. It's for those 1234 half-dozen people that you're going to know in church or your circle of friends who just know that they're not getting fed or serious content. You know it. They know it. That's the person we're shooting for, somebody who just wants to move beyond, supplement or replace or whatever, however they perceive it, what's happening in church for them in terms of content. That's the person we're looking for so that's a good way to approach it.

TS: Also do it for yourself because you know how frustrating it is when you have nobody else to talk to about this content. I mean my friend Jeff over a decade I was talking about the Divine Council worldview and just going on and on. You can't say too much because you overload people sometimes as there's so much to it. Imagine just the happiness that yourself you'll get by being able to share and have a conversation with somebody else about this stuff. If anything, do it for yourself for your own sanity or start a small Bible group. As this ministry is growing, we're really going to rely on our listeners and all of us to champion this.

MSH: The bottom line is this isn't going to grow without the listener. It's just that simple. This is a very grassroots, boots on the ground, kind of thing. We're not doing crazy stuff to draw attention of the gatekeepers in the Christian world and all that stuff. It's not our focus or interests. We're just looking for people who care about content. It's not going to grow unless listeners reach out to people and try get to get them to listen.

TS: Absolutely Mike. With that, I'm ready for chapter 7.

MSH: We're in Ezekiel 7 and just to situate everyone to reorient your mind, the first three chapters of Ezekiel were the call of Ezekiel. Typically, that's associated with the first chapter, but

as we saw, that extends on into Chapter 3. And then we looked at Ezekiel 4-5, which right after Ezekiel gets called to ministry, he delivers a series of sign acts against Jerusalem and Judah because that's all that's left. The northern kingdom by this time in Israel's history is toast. Literally, it is history. So Jerusalem and Judah are the focuses. Ezekiel was taken captive in the second wave of the demise of Judah as a political national entity. He's back there with the captives forecasting that this isn't over yet. Here's what's going to happen to the city and the temple. So he goes through a series of the sign acts. There were nine of them in chapters 4-5 about physically doing things to describe what's going happen to the city and its inhabitants. Then last time in chapter 6, we sort of got the whole rationale or cause for why God was so angry with Jerusalem and Judah. The answer to that was its idolatry. Remember, again, how this was framed. God wasn't so upset with people who were untaught by frankly apostate disloyal priests. People are going to be sheep without a shepherd. God's going to look at people who worship incorrectly, even worship another god wrongly, thinking that it's Yahweh or something like that.

He's going to look at people who'd just don't know better differently than he does with, the phrase we used last time was, state-sponsored apostasy, where you have people who do know better from the kings to the priests on down to the bureaucracy doing things like building a high places in Jerusalem located adjacent to the temple, and when you get to Manasseh, actually moving pagan objects into the temple itself, the holy place. When you do stuff like that, that is sort of the last straw with God. That's the thing that is going to break the covenantal bond and is going to sort of unleash the curses that we read about in Deuteronomy. Leviticus 26 was a focus last time because Ezekiel 6 borrows language from Leviticus 26 about if you go off and are disloyal to Yahweh when you worship other gods, then you're going to be driven from the land and so on so forth. This is what's happening or taking shape in real time in Ezekiel's lifetime. We can situate that further into what we call the Divine Council worldview where God is so offended at that because Jerusalem is his sacred space. You could say the whole land of Israel is sacred space to Yahweh, and that's true in the context of cosmic geography. But Jerusalem the city and the temple, this was Zion.

This was the place of Yahweh's habitation. This is where Yahweh conducts business with his council to administer the affairs of his people in his land, city, temple, and house. When you start building high places and objects of worship and conducting worship on that sacred space then that is going to be a clear violation that you are knowingly transgressing and worshipping other gods. You are no longer in a status of believing loyalty to Yahweh. You are surrendering that ground to other gods. So this is the context leading into Ezekiel 7. We've had the rationale for why God is so angry in the previous chapter. We hit chapter 7 and it's really a reiteration of you're doomed. If you wanted to take the whole chapter and encapsulate it into two words, it would be you're doomed. That's what we're going to get here in chapter 7. I'm going to read through the first 13 verses and then come back and comment on a few things. What we do here isn't, if you're new, it's not verse by verse. We take section by section and comment on things that interest me and I think are worth commenting on. So as we jump in here in verse 1 of chapter 7, we read the words the Lord came to me and you will Son of Man thus says the Lord God to lead of Israel and end,

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“And you, O son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel: An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. ³Now the end is upon you, and I will send my

anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. ⁴ And my eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity, but I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

⁵“Thus says the Lord GOD: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. ⁶ An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you. Behold, it comes. ⁷ Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come; the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of joyful shouting on the mountains. ⁸ Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. ⁹ And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the LORD, who strikes.

¹⁰“Behold, the day! Behold, it comes! Your doom has come; the rod has blossomed; pride has budded. ¹¹ Violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be preeminence among them. ¹² The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. ¹³ For the seller shall not return to what he has sold, while they live. For the vision concerns all their multitude; it shall not turn back; and because of his iniquity, none can maintain his life.

MSH: Now that's the first 13 verses and you'll notice as we read, there's lots of repetition in it. Specifically, what you have is you have three sort of short mini oracles, judgment pronouncements, that are linked together in these first 13 verses by similar phrases like the end has come, an end has come, the end is upon you, your doom has come, the time has come, behold it comes, all this sort of repetition. Those phrases that I just went through there, there are 9 or 10 of them in 27 verses. We only read the first 13 so most of them are actually in those 13 verses. It raises a question for commentators and close readers, what's up with this, why the repetition? And this brings us to an important theme and I think when we get to the end of our time today, I'm going to run full circle back here and say this is sort of the payoff point. We get it right up front. The repetition is there because of the belief or myth of the inviolability of Jerusalem, of Zion.

This is actually a topic that scholars discuss very specifically in Old Testament study, the inviolability of Zion, the inviolability of Jerusalem. What is that? It's the idea that Jerusalem's destruction was just simply inconceivable, that people just didn't think it was possible because of the Davidic covenant. God had promised this everlasting covenant with the dynasty of David. So how could God possibly destroy us? It is also propelled by the temple. This is where God lives. Why would he destroy his own house, the city of David? That's where the temple is located. There was this mythology or belief that because of the Davidic covenant, because of the temple, Zion, Jerusalem would never be destroyed. God just wouldn't do that. He wouldn't go there. The whole messaging here, Ezekiel's writing, and speaking earlier than the writing, to people who'd

grown up thinking this way and he has to pepper them just so they get the point and don't miss it. Your end has come. The time has come. Your doom is here. He just peppers them with this because if you just say it once, it's not going to catch. If you just say it over and over and over again, it reinforces the point that hey, you're sitting there thinking, okay, just put yourself in the situation.

We have had two waves now of captivity. Nebuchadnezzar has gone down into Jerusalem and is taking people out. Ezekiel went in the second wave. He's left the city standing, the temple standing. He's installed puppet rulers and leaders, puppet governors there. And so people are like well that was bad but we're still here. The temple and Jerusalem are still here. It's here because God will never allow it to be destroyed because of this theological thinking. And Ezekiel saying that just isn't true, it's just not true. This is not done yet and worse is yet to come. I've referred to this as a myth because it is. God didn't tie his own hands by making promises to David or by deciding to put his presence, to use the Deuteronomy language, to set his name in the city of Jerusalem in the temple. When God decides to do these things, he's not thinking I hope they don't get so bad because I'll never be able to pull out or destroy this place because I'm here. I don't want my house to get messed up. That's just mythological kind of thinking. But the people living at the time, they are thinking about the Davidic dynasty. They're thinking about their own history, too. At this point, we're in the 6th century BC. They've seen things like the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time, delivering the city supernaturally from the hands the Assyrians. When stuff like that happens, it's going to contribute to this belief that Zion is inviolable. It will never go away, never die, and never be destroyed. This is just what people expected and there is some historical reason for them to think these thoughts. But what I'm suggesting is that they're not thinking clearly. God's hands aren't tied. Let me just give you a couple of examples in the Hebrew Bible of this. If you go to Psalm 46 for instance, just think about what the psalmist says.

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”
¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

MSH: That's the whole Psalm. This is something that you would've heard before many times, not just in Psalm 46, there's Psalm 48 and other places that you become convinced, catch what I'm saying here. You interpret your Bible in such a way to think that God will not do XY or Z. You presume to know the limits of a passage. You presume to filter God through your understanding of some verses. I don't have to be terribly pointed here. We do this. When we get to the end of our time here, I'm going to be reiterating this. I hate to say it this way but many Christians view the church, their church, the nation, America, in these terms and what I'm suggesting to you, not only don't I believe that America's the new Israel or something like that, that's Mormon theology, that America's the new city of God or something like that. Not only don't I believe that, if we were, it wouldn't give us any comfort because God did destroy Israel. He did destroy Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple.

He had Nebuchadnezzar and other foreign invaders go in there and wipe the slate clean because of their apostasy. We're no better than they were. Being a citizen of any modern country nowadays doesn't make you one of the people of God. But we sort of cast things like this so I don't want to pick on the Israelites for believing in what really was a myth. God never promised that he wouldn't judge them. In fact, he promised the opposite. Back to Deuteronomy and Leviticus, if you turn away from me, I will drive you from the land. I will forsake you. I'm not just going to put up with rival deities being worshiped in my own house. I'm not going to do it. But somehow the people of Judah think that they'll look at a Psalm like Psalm 46 and think, we're okay. We're always going to be okay. It might get bad and God has to do something but he won't do this. That's just really not good biblical theology and all you got to do is look at your Old Testament for it. The innocent do suffer with the unrighteous as well so here we go. This is what I want to challenge you to think about as we go through this chapter and pick out a few other things.

Is this thinking because it's really dangerous to think that God will make an exception for me or for you or your church. In a world, back to the Divine Council worldview, if you've read Unseen Realm, this is all going to be familiar to you. Evil exists because God made the decision to allow free will beings, to create intelligent beings as his own imagers to represent him whether that be in the unseen world or the seen world. And part of that representation, the tools for representing God and imaging God involved God sharing his attributes with us. One of those is free will and with that comes the risk, the ability, and God wasn't surprised. He knows eventually beings who aren't him who can make free will decisions will make mistakes or rebel. Why, because they're him. None of this is a surprise to God. God isn't caught by surprise. Oh, I wish I wouldn't have allowed them to make free will decisions. I didn't see that coming. God saw it all coming but he was committed to it. And when it did come, he didn't scrap the plan. There is no plan B. There's only plan A. He's committed to humanity as his imager. That's why he has to step in and redeem people.

Yes, he has to punish but there's always redemption. These are big theological constructs but this is why there is evil. And when there is evil, when you have free beings decide to do evil, the righteous do suffer. People get caught up in in the midst of all that. The only alternative to this system, if you want to call it a system, is for God to have never have created humanity or any other intelligent being at all. The only way God escapes it is if he is totally alone, because he's the only one that's perfect. So we need to be looking at the wider theological worldview here and funnel it into Ezekiel's situation here Chapter 7. He's just telling people if you think you're the exception, think again. He's just laid out the reasons in Chapter 6. God is justified by using Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to do this because you are the ones that should have known better. Back to the whole thing of state sponsored, state promoted apostasy, it goes all the way back to Solomon. Solomon builds high places for foreign deities and it gets to the point where they're erecting these things right in the vicinity of God's own living space. God's just not going to tolerate that.

He doesn't tie his own hands and prevent himself from judging wickedness and from having victory over other gods. If part of that process is punishing his own people, the people of God, and then that's what's going to happen. So it's easy to see how they were thinking. Another example, you could go back to Isaiah 7. This is the "virgin birth" passage. If anybody wants to listen to a fuller lecture on this, go to the website DRMSH.com and click on the resources tab. Go to videos then to the one that says Jesus and the Old Testament number three. It's a lecture I have about Isaiah 7. I do affirm the virgin birth but Isaiah 7 itself is not about a virgin birth. The sign wasn't the sexual status of the woman. The sign was the son, the child, and the terms of Isaiah 7 actually fulfilled in Isaiah's own lifetime. It's just that later on with Jesus, Matthew sees an analogy between the circumstances of Jesus birth to what goes on Isaiah 7 and he quotes that to establish the point, to establish the analogy. Back in Isaiah 7, God wants Ahaz, he prompts Isaiah ask Ahaz for a sign that Ahaz is going to be protected from his enemies. Ahaz says I don't want to do that so he tries to act pious like I'm not going to ask God for a sign and basically God gets annoyed and says you're just wearying me with this false piety. Behold, the Lord himself will give you a sign.

And that's when we get the young maiden will conceive and bear a son and so on so forth. His name shall be called Immanuel, God is with us, and by the time the child can eat solid food, eat the curds and honey, these enemies of yours are just going to be toast. So there's a child. We don't know who the child is. We're never told. There are obviously different views. But God says I'm going to do all this stuff to protect you. How does that factor into Ezekiel 7 and the belief of Zion's inviolability, because God protects Ahaz. The sign was for Ahaz, the king. He is the Davidic heir and king. If Ahaz dies, the line of David is extinct. So the events of Isaiah 7 are going to contribute to this notion God will always step in and save Zion and Jerusalem. This is his place. He will not let it be destroyed. Ezekiel is saying through this repetition that's not really true. That is not the case. Nine times in 27 verses, but most of those are in the first 13 verses. He says the time has come, the end is come. Your doom has come. He couldn't make it any clearer. He's trying to get the message across. Now for people who are reading Ezekiel or listening to him who had read Amos, and Amos lived before Ezekiel. He was a prophet to the northern kingdom, which, of course, is already toast. What's really interesting is that the phrase, the end has come, which is used several times in Ezekiel 7, is only used elsewhere in Amos. Some scholars will have argued that it actually comes from the book of Amos.

If that's the case, even it's not the case, if people would have heard it and remembered Amos, that would have freaked people out. It would have scared them because Amos says the same thing right before the fall of the northern kingdom. So that would have jog their minds, the last time we heard somebody say that it was a set of circumstances and those 10 tribes just are gone. They've been scattered to the wind. So this kind of language should have alerted the people listening to Ezekiel or reading Ezekiel at that time in whatever form they would've gotten it. It would have been listeners in terms of real time because this around 590. It's going to be four years or so the temple is going to be destroyed. So the material probably wasn't written down by then. But we get it and we can sort of do the math. But when they're hearing this, they know passages from Leviticus. They know Deuteronomy. They could have had Hosea. They know these stories or in textual form about how God protected Zion earlier. They're making certain theological assumptions and Ezekiel's saying it just isn't the case. You're going to get a really really rude awakening in a short amount of time. I want to go back and hit a few things here and then we're going to go from verse 10 onward. We read through verse 13 but really using verse 10 as our launching pad here and moving onward. There are a few interesting phrases that Ezekiel uses to describe the situation. We've already seen a lot of repetition that follows. Let me just quickly read the rest of the chapter, verses 14-27. You're going to get more repetition. A lot of this is self-explanatory but there are a number of phrases and terms that we don't really pick up on well that fit into the sort of theme I've been talking about. That's where I want to camp for the rest of our time here. So the first 13 verses, Ezekiel's saying your doom is coming. It's going to be awful. The whole multitude is going to be under judgment. Then he says in verse 14,

¹⁴“They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but none goes to battle, for my wrath is upon all their multitude. ¹⁵ The sword is without; pestilence and famine are within. He who is in the field dies by the sword, and him who is in the city famine and pestilence devour. ¹⁶ And if any survivors escape, they will be on the mountains, like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each one over his iniquity. ¹⁷ All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water. ¹⁸ They put on sackcloth, and horror covers them. Shame is on all faces, and baldness on all their heads. ¹⁹ They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity. ²⁰ His beautiful ornament they used for pride, and they made their abominable images and their detestable things of it. Therefore I make it an unclean thing to them. ²¹ And I will give it into the hands of foreigners for prey, and to the wicked of the earth for spoil, and they shall profane it. ²² I will turn my face from them, and they shall profane my treasured place. Robbers shall enter and profane it.

²³ “Forge a chain! For the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence. ²⁴ I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned. ²⁵ When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there shall be none. ²⁶ Disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor.

They seek a vision from the prophet, while the law perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders.²⁷ The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land are paralyzed by terror. According to their way I will do to them, and according to their judgments I will judge them, and they shall know that I am the LORD.”

MSH: Not a pretty picture, like I said last time, we’re going to get used to this kind of thing in Ezekiel. Let’s go back even further to verse 10 and just pick up a few things that I think are interesting, that are easy to miss or not catch our eye. In verse 10, there is a particular word here, doom, that is interesting. It’s also used in verse 7. In Hebrew, it’s *tsephirah*, and it’s only used in one other place, Isaiah 28:5

⁵ In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory,
and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people,

MSH: Now *tsephirah* is a word in Ezekiel the ESV translates doom and is the word that Isaiah 28:5 has as a diadem or a crown of beauty. So how can the same word, here we have in Isaiah this description of a crown, maybe a metal crown. It could be a garland of something around someone's head. But it's a positive image whereas back in Ezekiel, why would we translate it doom? A lot of people have sort of picked up on this apparent disconnect and there are a number of scholars that think we would be better off here instead of translating it doom, something like this, back to Ezekiel 7:10,

¹⁰ “Behold, the day! Behold, it comes! Your [chain] has come; the rod has blossomed; pride has budded.

MSH: Capturing the idea of this ring that can be put around something, so maybe a chain or a leash or some kind of thing that binds, maybe a rope or something like that. So a lot of scholars would disagree with the way ESV has this. I’m using the ESV. And if it's a reference to a chain, that means your bondage has come. It would be a metaphor of bondage. That's going to fit the context so in my judgment it’s probably a good solution or way to understand this term. But it's not the kind of thing that would sort of pop up in our heads. The reason I mention it is because of what follows it. You have your chain or your leash or bondage has come. I’m correcting the translation now. Then we have the rod has blossomed. That typically takes people mentally, a budding rod that takes people mentally back to Aaron’s staff. If you think about that, that doesn't make any sense either because that was another positive image, Aaron's staff budding.

That was a sign, if you remember the story that God approved of Aaron as the high priest, sort of the sign of Aaron’s election as high priest. It wasn't a symbol of doom and it wasn't a negative symbol of all. So scholars have looked at this doom word and say it’s not really doom but it's probably something like a chain or denotes bondage. That means it would make sense here and it’s the same kind of ring imagery back in Isaiah so that looks good. But this whole rod thing evokes a positive image when really the context declares something negative. If you look at the word rod in Hebrew, if you know a little Hebrew you might be able to guess what it is here. It’s *matteh*. Scholars have proposed there's another word in Hebrew with the same consonants but different vowels, *mutteh*, and that occurs elsewhere in Ezekiel 9:9 so Ezekiel uses that word

a little bit later. That word means injustice or guilt. So it's probably best to change the pointing or the vowels on this Hebrew word so that it makes sense as a negative image. Let's go back to verse 10,

¹⁰“Behold, the day! Behold, it comes! Your [bondage] has come; [injustice; guilt] has blossomed; pride has budded.

MSH: Now all three of them make sense together. They're all three negative images. The terminology makes sense in the Hebrew text so on so forth. If you remember back to the very first episode of Ezekiel when we introduced the book, I mentioned we're going to get situations in the book where we're going to have to do a little textual criticism, look at the text and see what's going on there, and occasionally, amend the text, in this case, change the vowels so that it makes sense or try to use cross-references to make sense out of a particular term. That's just what you have in Ezekiel. There are a lot of things like this that happen. This chapter, by the way, if you have Block's commentary, he makes a comment really early on in this chapter that this chapter's kind of a mess for this sort of thing. There's lots of these sorts of interpretive problems. I'm only picking out a couple just because I think they're interesting, things that you might wonder about. But Ezekiel is just full of that sort of thing where you have to do some evaluation here and actually look at the text and try to figure out what else might it mean or say. The other advantage to this is if you try to come up with some way to keep these things in a negative context, if it's with verse 11, you have here your bondage has come, injustice has blossomed, pride is budded, violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness. There you have rod of wickedness. Certainly we can't have the blossoming or budding rod of Aaron in parallel to rod of wickedness. It just doesn't make any sense. But a rod of injustice and a rod of wickedness makes perfect sense.

None of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be preeminence among them.

MSH: Basically Ezekiel is saying things have come full circle here. Your iniquity or apostasy is sort of tiptop full and because of that your bondage is right around the corner. The time has come, verse 12, the day has arrived. You're going to get what you deserve. And if you are wondering if you deserve it, go back to chapter 6. Yeah, you deserve it. Keep going in verses 12 and 13, we have this phrase,

Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. ¹³For the seller shall not return to what he has sold, while they live.

MSH: Basically, it's going to be so bad you're not going to really care about your business. You're not going to be in a situation where your livelihood can reset. You're going to lose everything and you're going to know it. He's describing economic devastation. Life will never return to the way it was, at least for your generation. This isn't something that's just going to blow through Jerusalem and it's like you pick up the pieces and start all over again. It's going to

be worse than that. I actually like what Block says here. He is a paragraph about this little section. This is from the first volume of his Ezekiel commentary around page 259-260. He says,

“The devastating economic impact of Yahweh's Day of wrath is vividly illustrated in verses 12-13 and then return to again in verse 19. The collapse of the economy will be total rendering all business transactions futile. The buyer will have no time or motivation to rejoice over the good deal he has made nor will the seller regret that he has parted with his treasured possession. In fact, in a grim parody of the ancient laws of Jubilee, the prophet declares that patrimonial property that has been lost to the family will not return. The year of Jubilee will be canceled. Even though both parties to business transactions are still living, any legal procedures to reclaim lost property will be forestalled by the inevitable and irrevocable day of Yahweh. In short, buying and selling, celebrating and morning business deals will be irrelevant in this environment where the economic infrastructure has totally collapsed. In the event, the people will fall victim to their own iniquity with all their props knocked out from under them. Indeed, to borrow the image of Isaiah 24:2, the wrath of Yahweh will prove the great equalizer. When he is through, the entire population, people and priest, servant and master maid and mistress, buyer and seller, lender and borrower, creditor and debtor, will have been reduced to the lowest common denominator.”

MSH: That's a great paragraph and it really captures what Ezekiel is saying here in a nutshell. This is going to be so bad that nothing you have experienced prior to this time except maybe bondage in Egypt when you were all slaves, nothing that you've experienced is going to be like this. There will be no reset for this generation. Your bondage is imminent. You will be just destroyed and carried away and lose everything. So Ezekiel's trying to really use dramatic terms and repetition to keep beating this into their heads about what's going to happen. I'll read verse 14-18 here.

¹⁴“They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but none goes to battle, for my wrath is upon all their multitude. ¹⁵The sword is without; pestilence and famine are within. He who is in the field dies by the sword, and him who is in the city famine and pestilence devour. ¹⁶And if any survivors escape, they will be on the mountains, like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each one over his iniquity. ¹⁷All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water. ¹⁸They put on sackcloth, and horror covers them. Shame is on all faces, and baldness on all their heads.

MSH: That's 14 through 18. If the earlier section was sort of economic impact, Block talks about the psychological impact of this next section. If you look at it, that's kind of evident. They're essentially in an emotional paralysis. They blow the trumpet. Everything is ready to defend the city but nobody goes to battle. It's as though they look at what's staring them in the face and they just lose heart. They just know there is no way out. They hear the watchman's trumpet, Ezekiel uses the watchman metaphor a lot to alert the people that the Babylonians are coming and

they've made reparations to defend the city but when it's time to defend the place, they're hopeless. They are in a state of hopelessness. They can't do a thing. If they attempt to flee out into the field, they're going to get killed with the sword. If they stay in the city, siege warfare of the day.

We've talked about that before where not only would, like the Assyrians, they would use things to scale the city and knock down the walls or puncture holes and they're going to get people, but a lot of siege warfare would take weeks and months. They would surround the city and literally starve the people out. They would burn the fields outside the city. They would destroy the food. They would cut off water supply if there's water going into the city. You can't just go out and get water because you're going to get killed by the enemy soldiers. You're going to die of thirst and hunger, and there's no way to dispose of waste outside the city. You're going to have disease. Siege warfare was a terrible thing if you were caught in the midst of it and couldn't get out. And that's what Ezekiel's describing here. A couple of interesting turns of phrase here. The hands of feeble, that's self-explanatory, your physical power is spent. You're unable to respond. The more interesting one is knees turned to water. Maybe one of these episodes of the podcast we should do an episode on, for lack of better terms, scatological language in the Bible. The euphemisms that are used for bodily functions to sort of make them less course. This is one of them. Block isn't the only one but other scholars have commented on this phrase and language. Block says,

“Basically, the phrase means all their knees will run with urine. The prophet is hereby referring to the loss of bladder control that occurs in a moment of extreme crisis. Ezekiel's expression recalls a neo-Assyrian description of fleeing enemies. Here's what the Assyrians wrote, 'their hearts beat like that of a fledgling dove chased away and they passed hot urine.'”

MSH: You can be sure the Assyrians loved to write stuff like that because they're the Klingons of the Old Testament. They're going to record stuff like this, the effect that their presence had a population or city or people literally going down in flames. And this is a similar phrase to what it is found in that description and other sources as well. They're going to pee themselves. As we said last time and before, Ezekiel is sort of known for being the book where a lot of this kind of language is used, a lot of earthy coarse scatological off-color sexually explicit, like chapter 16, Ezekiel has a lot of this stuff in it that's sort of disguised not only by English translation but even in the Hebrew text they will use euphemisms for some of these things. It's a pretty dire picture. Moving onto 19-24, we've had an economic impact and psychological impact description, 19-24, it should be obvious that here we get into sort of a spiritual reaction.

¹⁹ They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity.

MSH: The whole idea is the silver and gold could refer to wealth but when it talks about they're unable to satisfy their hunger with these things, or the silver and gold's not able to deliver them

in the day of wrath of the Lord, while it could refer to they can't bribe their way out of this, a lot of scholars think this refers to idols. In other words, the idols that were made with silver and gold, those idols can't save the people and the people can't eat them. They're going to starve. They're basically no good at all and the rest of the passage sort of tips interpretation that direction. Verse 20 says,

²⁰ His beautiful ornament they used for pride, and they made their abominable images and their detestable things of it. Therefore I make it an unclean thing to them. ²¹ And I will give it into the hands of foreigners for prey,

MSH: All these precious idols that the Israelite state, the apostate priests and the kings or whoever treated as sacred objects and they assigned it sacred space and they did sacred rituals for it. They had to purify themselves to be in its presence. God says I'm going to bring foreigners in here who will treat the stuff that you thought was sacred like garbage because that's what it is. It's really what is at the end of the day. I will bring in foreigners here to profane the things that you assign sacred status to. They can't save you. They can't do a blasted thing for you. The curious phrase here is his beautiful ornament they use for pride. Now right here on 590 or so BC with Ezekiel, the question is, is this a generic reference to taking the treasures of the temple, the treasuries, the silver and gold that was kept in the temple precincts that was given over to Yahweh, is it a reference to taking that and fashioning idols with it? It certainly could be. Obviously that would make sense to meltdown the silver and gold that was stored up in Yahweh's house and you make idols with it. For instance, later on Ezekiel 16:17,

⁷ You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore.

MSH: That's using sexual imagery. Ezekiel 16 is known for its sexually explicit stuff. Basically, you made phallic objects, male phallic objects, and screwed yourselves with them. That's what he's saying in Ezekiel 16. And so it could be because the people of God are described as the bride and bride is the one who commits whoredom with these objects. That's why you have the female to male language in Ezekiel 16. We'll eventually get there. Won't that be a memorable episode? But at the very least because of a parallel like Ezekiel 16 it may refer to taking the silver and gold and making idols out of. There are some that wonder though, his beautiful ornament, could this refer to the Ark of the Covenant? If you're one that think's the Ark of the Covenant survived the Babylonian invasion, I won't say that that's not possible. But you got to have a textually-based argument and not something that comes from Indiana Jones. I think it is possible, it would be a whole episode to talk about theories of what happened to the Ark, but the reason why scripturally it may be unlikely actually comes from Jeremiah 3:16 which says this. Jeremiah is speaking right before the Babylonian invasion. He's right when Nebuchadnezzar comes for the last time. He says,

¹⁶ And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant

of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again.

MSH: That verse suggests that in conjunction with the last invasion of Nebuchadnezzar that the Ark was destroyed. It didn't survive. If it survived, you wouldn't be talking about making it again, making a new one. So I realize this doesn't jive with the book of Indiana Jones. I like a movie like anybody else and I love getting into the theories of what happened to the Ark. I've been there done that a number of times. It's fascinating. You could make a good case for Ark survival on one or two trajectories but this verse gets in the way. Jeremiah 3:16 gets in the way because of the language that's used here. You have to deal with that. If you take us back to Ezekiel 7, my beautiful or his beautiful ornament, could it refer to the Ark? Is it an oblique reference to that? We don't know ultimately. If it is, wouldn't that be awful. They took it and melted it down and made idols out of it. Just think about that. It would be a terrible thing. So when God says in verse 24,

²⁴ I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned.

MSH: You get a little bit of an idea for why that's justified. Lastly, in verses 25- 27, we read this.

²⁵ When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there shall be none.

²⁶ Disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor. They seek a vision from the prophet,

MSH: Block translates this, they will demand a vision from the prophet, which I think does capture it a little bit better. Hey prophet, do something for us. Give us a vision about how we're going to survive and remember the inviolability of Zion and this is God's house. Speak up. It's not going to happen.

They [will demand] a vision from the prophet, while the law [Torah] perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders. ²⁷ The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land are paralyzed by terror. According to their way I will do to them, and according to their judgments I will judge them, and they shall know that I am the LORD.”

MSH: The priest isn't going to know what to tell you. It's not go out and do a few Hail Mary's or this or that ritual, it will all be okay. God will relent. The priest is going to have nothing to say and neither will there be counsel from the elders, your quasi-religious political leaders, you're advisors to the king. There is no solution. Don't look for any is what Ezekiel is saying. There is no solution. There is nothing that is going to dissuade God from doing what he needs to do here and what he is going to do. So there's no use in appealing to spiritual authorities for intercession, what can we do to make God relent. Short answer, nothing, and there's no sense in appealing the political leadership or even your fellow citizens. Who's going to help? The short

answer is nobody. This is the message in chapter 7. As we wrap up here, I think the real take away for us really is twofold. I harped a little bit upon the inviolability idea.

Before we sort of snicker or look down on the Israelites, how could they have been so foolish to think that Zion was inviolable, that God would never let it die, that God would never let it be destroyed is probably a better way to say that, that God wouldn't touch it because he was associated with it, before we're too quick to sort of snicker at them for that misconception, do we think the same? Do we? Do we think the same thing about the church here in America? America is the last best hope. I believe that. I think it is the best country in the world. I think there in a number of fundamental things that separates us from everywhere else. But American is not the kingdom of God or the new Israel. Jesus couldn't have been clearer when he said my kingdom is not of this world. America is of this world so by definition it can't be that. It's very simple but we tend to think of ourselves because we have been so blessed by God and this has been a place where the gospel can flourish where there's freedom. All those things are wonderful and shouldn't be taken for granted. But the fact that they exist is not an argument that they will always exist.

The fact that they exist isn't an argument that we have special divinely sanctioned status from on high. The hand of God is always going to keep this country as it was or as it is. There is no such guarantee. There wasn't for Israel and there isn't for us. There isn't for our church. Even if you have a good church, even if you weren't a part of these state sanctioned apostasy of Israel, people who were godly still suffered because of what the ungodly had done. I don't think it takes much commentary to think that this really isn't that far from where we're living now because you look around and for all the wonderful things that we can cite America for, we are living in a frankly godless nation. We have turned the corner. Our leadership is just hell bent, the Gadarene Roche to any perversity or point of ungodliness. If they see it, they're chasing it down and glorify it, sanctioning it, making it a virtue. That's the nature of the country in which we live and it shouldn't be that way. I don't want it to be that way. It would be wonderful if it wasn't. It's worth defending to get it back to a place where we don't have to think those thoughts and we don't have those realizations.

But the bottom line is this is a human creation. Our country is a human creation. We're blessed to be here because we could be a whole lot worse. There are other worse places but we need to start thinking about the distinction between the Kingdom of God, the thing that is eternal, that thing which is eternal, that thing where Jesus said don't fear those who are able to kill the body, to destroy the body. Fear the one who is able to destroy the soul. What's eternal and what isn't? This is why in a number of other contexts, even my fiction or whatnot, I'm trying to get people start thinking about if we lose the freedoms that we have and things get tough for us, if we fall under, if the righteous suffer because of the apostasy and the evil of our leadership whether that be in political circles or within our own church, and trust me, we could have a long conversation about that one, too, about the apostasy within the "believing" community. If the righteous suffer because of those things, how do we still carry out the great commission? How do we still do the things we're supposed to do, that God wants us to be done, wants us to do?

How does the church flourish under persecution and awful circumstances? It does. In our own day and age, you could point to the Third World or Africa or China, Soviet Union, the underground church. It's booming and bursting at the seams. How does that happen? I think we need to start thinking about what is eternal, what is the Kingdom of God, and what is lesser on lower pedestal? Bless God that we have the freedoms that we do and hopefully they will be

sustained, but if not, we do have a higher thing to aspire to and we have membership in a greater entity than our own country or political system. We are members of the Kingdom of God and even if we suffer loss of life or whatever, God still remembered the godly of his people in these circumstances back here. He was just warning them to tell them apostasy will be punished. There will be a cost but at the end of the day, the Lord knows who was righteous and who's not. He knows who are his and belong to him, and those who don't. This is a chapter in Ezekiel that can help straighten out our thinking, get us focused on the things that are eternal versus the things that aren't.