

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Spare the Rod, Spoil the Nation”

7:1-19

I am an advocate of spanking if it is conducted in a manner consistent with the Bible’s teaching on corporal punishment.

By ‘spanking’ I do not mean abuse or hitting or violence against children. I know what that looks like from my volunteering as a law enforcement chaplain.

The Bible advocates the use of an implement, a “rod,” to inflict a stinging pain upon the buttocks of a child in order to discipline them for disobedience and rebellion.

When your child has earned a spanking there can be no turning back. Send them to their room. Go get the “rod,” which is an age-appropriate paddle. Go into their room. Clarify the reason or reasons why they must be disciplined. Apply the paddle properly to the buttocks. Let them cry but not excessively. Pray with them. Go on with your life.

Once you say, “Go to your room,” some kids will plead with you to not spank them. They’ll be good; they didn’t understand but now they do. Just give them another chance.

Other kids get defiant. They go, but their still rebelling in their hearts.

Either way, the spanking is administered and it accomplishes its purpose.

Ezekiel refers to a “rod” in verses ten and eleven. After literally hundreds of years of warnings it was time for God to spank His backslidden people. It

must be done, for their own good, despite either their pleadings or their continued defiance.

Passages like these are no more fun than it is to discipline a child. But they do provide us with insight into the Father heart of our God. He acts as any loving father must act. If we bear that in mind we will not think any of this strange or accuse Him of some wrongdoing.

We will, in fact, weep with Him for the necessity of His actions.

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

Ezekiel 7:2 "And you, 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.

Ezekiel 7:3 Now the end has come upon you, And I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways, And I will repay you for all your abominations.

The word that jumps out from these verses is “end.” Times of instruction followed by warnings were ended. Times of sending prophets to prophesy were ended. It was time for the Jews to go to their rooms and get their national spanking.

Don't get stumbled by the word “anger.” We immediately think of someone losing their temper and acting rashly. We might suggest they go to anger management.

God's “anger” is already managed. God's “anger” is His action against sin after His longsuffering has run its course. It is an attribute that accompanies His holiness.

- Because He is love, and because He has made Himself sin on our behalf, He can be longsuffering, waiting for men to turn from sin.
- But because He is holy, He must hate sin and He must judge sin.

He would “repay” them for their “abominations.” We've seen that the major issue was their idolatry involving immoral and illicit activities. They had chosen to pursue those practices and had earned their punishment.

If you are a good parent you set realistic rules and boundaries. Your kids know them, or they should. In a sense they earn their discipline by willfully

choosing to disregard and to disobey. They bring punishment upon themselves.

God is therefore acting as a good parent in disciplining His people. Read through the Book of Deuteronomy and you will see Him clearly spell-out the blessings for obedience and the punishments for disobedience.

Sadly, since they are a nation, discipline comes to them in the form of being overthrown and overrun by another nation. It's going to be pretty rough.

Ezekiel 7:4 My eye will not spare you, Nor will I have pity; But I will repay your ways, And your abominations will be in your midst; Then you shall know that I am the Lord!

There was never a spanking I looked forward to giving or enjoyed performing. It had to be done, however. My eye could not spare Gene nor could I have pity on Mary.

Babylon was an idolatrous culture and country. At one point King Nebuchadnezzar had constructed a statue of himself out in the plains and he demanded everyone bow down to it and worship.

They had gone after “abominations” so they would be surrounded by them in captivity.

All of it had as its purpose that they would “know that” God was their “Lord.” It would restore them to His beauty and to their blessing.

Ezekiel 7:5 "Thus says the Lord God: 'A disaster, a singular disaster; Behold, it has come!

Ezekiel 7:6 An end has come, The end has come; It has dawned for you; Behold, it has come!

Ezekiel 7:7 Doom has come to you, you who dwell in the land; The time has come, A day of trouble is near, And not of rejoicing in the mountains.

Ezekiel 7:8 Now upon you I will soon pour out My fury, And spend My anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, And I will repay you for all your abominations.

I'm told by Hebrew scholars that there is a play on words in this section that cannot be properly translated into English. When it says “it has dawned,” the phrase means that punishment has been sleeping but is now woken up.

“Let sleeping dogs lie” comes to mind! Punishment is something you do not want to awaken.

Note the emphasis of “the end,” “the time has come,” “is near,” and “soon.” Time for repentance has passed.

When you read that God will “pour out” His “fury” and “spend” His “anger” keep it in context. He was going to spank them, for their good.

The paddle He must use would be Babylon. Instead of an age-appropriate paddle we could talk of a nation-appropriate paddle.

I always like to mention that without a grasp of God’s plan of redemption you cannot understand the flow of nations in world history.

Ezekiel 7:9 'My eye will not spare, Nor will I have pity; I will repay you according to your ways, And your abominations will be in your midst. Then you shall know that I am the Lord who strikes.

Verses eight and nine are very similar to verses three and four. There is a finality in their repetition. “Go to your room.”

Here comes the “rod.”

Ezekiel 7:10 'Behold, the day! Behold, it has come! Doom has gone out; The rod has blossomed, Pride has budded.

Ezekiel 7:11 Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness; None of them shall remain, None of their multitude, None of them; Nor shall there be wailing for them.

Commentators, both Jewish and Christian, are not in agreement about what, exactly, the “rod” symbolizes. Some say it is Israel; some say it is Babylon; some say it is both.

I think it is Babylon in the hand of God as His implement of discipline because of the “pride” that has “budded,” and the “violence” and the “wickedness” of the Hebrews.

Babylon would besiege Jerusalem. Economic collapse would be the first result of the siege. Something we can currently relate to.

Ezekiel 7:12 The time has come, The day draws near. 'Let not the buyer rejoice, Nor the seller mourn, For wrath is on their whole multitude.

Ezekiel 7:13 For the seller shall not return to what has been sold, Though he may still be alive; For the vision concerns the whole multitude, And it shall not turn back; No one will strengthen himself Who lives in iniquity.

The “seller” returning was like shorthand that stood for the entire Jewish economic system. You see, in Israel they had sabbatic laws that returned property to its rightful owners every seven and every seventieth year.

That entire system was going to collapse when Babylon took over. This was their crash of 1929. “It shall not turn back,” was the forecast.

We are in tough economic times. We have hope, and there are signs, things will get better. What if you knew for certain it would not “turn back?”

“No one will strengthen himself who lives in iniquity” meant that because of their iniquity there was no hope and, therefore, no use trying to “strengthen” one another with false hope.

Whether our economy ever rebounds and returns, we can vow to live without iniquity. We can represent the Lord, live for Him, serve Him.

Ezekiel 7:14 'They have blown the trumpet and made everyone ready, But no one goes to battle; For My wrath is on all their multitude.

Their military might would be of no avail. Even if they could match up against Babylon, God was against them and they would fall and fail.

We must maintain the strongest military in the world. But all of our military might will not avail if we turn our backs on God.

The next several verses depict the conditions that will prevail during and following the siege.

Ezekiel 7:15 The sword is outside, And the pestilence and famine within. Whoever is in the field Will die by the sword; And whoever is in the city, Famine and pestilence will devour him.

I think one of the most tragic images in our modern world is when folks in a burning building decide its better to jump to their death than burn to death.

During the siege against Jerusalem you had two similar fatal choices:

1. Die from “pestilence and famine within” the city.
2. Sneak out into the surrounding “field[s]” and be killed by soldiers.

Some would escape in the final battle, during the confusion. They are described in verses sixteen through nineteen.

Ezekiel 7:16 'Those who survive will escape and be on the mountains Like doves of the valleys, All of them mourning, Each for his iniquity.

Note the condition of their hearts. Finally, at long last, they will “each” be “mourning” for their own “iniquity.”

In other words, **God’s discipline will be effective.** It’s just sad they did not repent sooner than later.

Look at their condition:

Ezekiel 7:17 Every hand will be feeble, And every knee will be as weak as water.

Ezekiel 7:18 They will also be girded with sackcloth; Horror will cover them; Shame will be on every face, Baldness on all their heads.

In verse seventeen you see the physical effects that came upon them from the long siege.

It’s not really the point of the verse but I might mention that often folks who sin for a long time really look wasted as they destroy their bodies. Sin may be pleasurable for a season but it can be devastating over the course of time.

In verse eighteen you have physical effects that they bring upon themselves to give a representation that they understand the shame of their sin.

Whatever happened to shame? Today folks sin openly and without any sense of shame. We’ve been desensitized to think that a politician’s personal life, for example, has nothing to do with his public service.

Ezekiel 7:19 'They will throw their silver into the streets, And their gold will be like refuse; Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them In the day of the wrath

of the Lord; They will not satisfy their souls, Nor fill their stomachs, Because it became their stumbling block of iniquity.

“Silver and gold” represent a trust in the things of this world. In the end all things material will fail, so why trust in them at all? Why not, rather, invest them in the work of the kingdom of God where they will pay rich dividends.

I’m privileged to be on the corporate boards of several churches. All of them are experiencing tough economic times as we all go through this depression or recession (or whatever it would be properly called by economists).

In some cases folks have lost their income. You really can’t expect them to be giving to the kingdom if they have nothing to give.

But in a lot of cases income isn’t the issue. In some, income has increased. But giving to God is down.

It’s just an observation but I’d have to say that in those cases the kingdom of God is not a first priority. Those folks are not seeking first the kingdom of God.

I mentioned Deuteronomy. Man, it is full of blessings and bummers.

I think Jesus simplified all that for us when He said to seek first the kingdom of God and all these things would be added to us.

Ask yourself this question: “If someone were to evaluate my life, would they be able to say I am seeking first the kingdom?”

Then everyday work towards getting or maintaining an affirmative answer.