

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“That’s the Sound of God’s Man Workin’ on the Chain Gang”

7:20-27

“Make a chain.”

With that directive from God Ezekiel would pursue the forging of a chain by which he would shackle himself.

He would act-out before God’s people what awaited the residents of Jerusalem. The survivors of the third Babylonian siege would be chained by their captors and driven the 700 miles to Babylon where they would live as a subjected people.

It was hard for the average Hebrew to believe Jerusalem would fall. After all, it was the site of the Temple. God dwelt among His people there in the Holy of Holies. Certainly, they thought, God would protect and preserve His dwelling.

No, He wouldn’t, and in these verses we get insight into why He wouldn’t.

Ezekiel 7:20 'As for the beauty of his ornaments, He set it in majesty; But they made from it The images of their abominations - Their detestable things; Therefore I have made it Like refuse to them.

The Temple is described as having beautiful “ornaments” and as a place God “set... in majesty.”

The Book of Exodus is filled with chapter after chapter on the materials for, and the building of, the Tabernacle. One author noted, “God created the whole world in six days, but he used forty to instruct Moses about the

tabernacle. Little over one chapter was needed to describe the structure of the world, but six were used for the tabernacle.”

Listen to this description of the beautiful ornamentation:

The tabernacle was a facility which displayed fabulous wealth and beauty. It does not take more than a casual reading of the text to learn that the tabernacle was a very costly project. [A] study of Hebrew weights... reckons the talent at about 64lbs... and the sanctuary shekel 1/3oz... According to this calculation there would be some 1,900lbs. of gold, 6,437lbs. of silver, and 4,522lbs. of bronze.¹

According to one calculation, that's \$30 million just in gold.

The Jews “made from it the images of their abominations.” They used materials from the Temple to form idols to worship.

They looted their own Temple, God's dwelling place, to provide for their idolatry.

Looters are pretty low on the social scale in our minds. It's bad enough someone's home or business is in the way of some catastrophe. To then steal from that unprotected property is the worst.

The Jews expected God to protect the Temple, and Jerusalem and them, from Babylon and other foreign powers. **But they were the ones who had been looting the Temple!** They didn't want God to interfere with their looting.

Sin always seems worse when it is being committed by someone else. We should let judgment begin in the house of God.

God would make the Temple “like refuse to them.” In other words, He would remove the beautiful ornamentation and take away the materials they were abusing for their idolatries. Once the Temple was like a garbage dump there would be no raw material from which to forge idols.

Ezekiel 7:21 I will give it as plunder Into the hands of strangers, And to the wicked of the earth as spoil; And they shall defile it.

¹ <http://bible.org/seriespage/tabernacle-dwelling-place-god-exodus-36882113943>

How could God let nonbelieving Gentile pagans “defile” His holy Temple? *The Jews had already defiled it!* Having “strangers” “plunder” it would show the Jews how they had been treating it.

Ezekiel 7:22 I will turn My face from them, And they will defile My secret place; For robbers shall enter it and defile it.

God would not protect the Temple. He would not stop its destruction. He would look the other way while it was robbed and defiled.

He desired to dwell among His people. But since they did not desire His presence, then God had no need for a dwelling place among them.

One thing I loved about the 18 years we met at the Kings County YMCA. You had to really love the fellowship to put up with all the set-up, tear-down, and distractions. There was nothing ‘turn-key’ about it that you could take for granted.

Ezekiel 7:23 'Make a chain, For the land is filled with crimes of blood, And the city is full of violence.

You wear a lot of different hats when you are God’s servant. Ezekiel was told to “make a chain.” We’re not told how involved he was, whether he manufactured it or not. But I’d like to think he was a hands-on guy who went down to the metal shop and either made it himself or supervised the work.

The “land” was Judah, the “city,” Jerusalem. Ezekiel was already in Babylon, having been deported as a captive in an earlier siege. He was depicting the fact that the Jews remaining in the land would be chained and driven to Babylon.

The use of Babylon to chain them was justified because of the “crimes of blood” and “violence” in the nation. Israel had a strong law, God’s law, but was not applying it. Society was spiraling downward.

O, how we need revival in America! Crimes of blood and violence characterize our cities.

The making of the chain is significant. It was something Ezekiel did to himself. Sure, it was Babylon that literally chained them for the long march to the Euphrates River. But the chains were really of their own making.

We speak today of being enslaved to certain habits, of being chained. The chains are usually of our own making as we indulge ourselves thinking we have the power to say “No!” and stop at any time. The flesh should never be indulged - not for a moment.

Ezekiel 7:24 Therefore I will bring the worst of the Gentiles, And they will possess their houses; I will cause the pomp of the strong to cease, And their holy places shall be defiled.

Listen to this assessment of sixth century Babylon from a secular source:

Under Nabopolassar, Babylon threw off the Assyrian rule in 626BC and became the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Chaldean Empire. With the recovery of Babylonian independence, a new era of architectural activity ensued, and [Nebuchadnezzar's] son Nebuchadnezzar II... made Babylon into one of the wonders of the ancient world. Nebuchadnezzar ordered the complete reconstruction of the imperial grounds, including rebuilding the Etemenanki ziggurat and the construction of the Ishtar Gate - the most spectacular of eight gates that ringed the perimeter of Babylon... Nebuchadnezzar is also credited with the construction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world).²

God's assessment of the Babylonians wasn't very positive! They were, at that time, “the worst of the Gentiles.”

Think of any great city today and God's assessment would be the same. What men value and marvel at is insignificant from God's perspective. So should it be of little significance to us. We can enjoy things without becoming enamored of them. It is all going to burn one day.

The “worst of the Gentiles” was better than allowing God's backslidden people to continue.

Ezekiel 7:25 Destruction comes; They will seek peace, but there shall be none.

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon>

The seeking of “peace” might be a reference to political activity to try to foil Babylon, such as alliances with other nations like Egypt.

The point we might make here is that a backslidden people cannot hope in politics. Hope is in returning to God, to righteousness that will exalt a nation.

Ezekiel 7:26 Disaster will come upon disaster, And rumor will be upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; But the law will perish from the priest, And counsel from the elders.

“Disaster... upon disaster.” I love that line in the film *Apollo 13* when something minor goes wrong and Tom Hanks says, “Well, we just had our glitch for this mission.” Little did they know something more, something worse, was about to occur.

We’d like to think disasters wouldn’t pile-up but they often do. It is superstitious to think otherwise. Instead we remember that all things are working together for the good of those who love the Lord - even when God seems to be piling on.

“Rumor will be upon rumor.” What we think might happen can be worse than what is actually occurring. Case in point: Y2K. People were led to all sorts of extremes based on rumor.

2012 is shaping-up that way. It is merely the topic of movies and educational shows now. But as December 21, 2012, draws near I would not be surprised if we witnessed all manner of wacky behaviors based on rumor.

“Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; But the law will perish from the priest, And counsel from the elders.” Let’s read this in conjunction with the last verse of chapter seven.

Ezekiel 7:27 'The king will mourn, The prince will be clothed with desolation, And the hands of the common people will tremble. I will do to them according to their way, And according to what they deserve I will judge them; Then they shall know that I am the Lord! "

Every avenue and resource for advice, direction, wisdom, and counsel will be useless.

- Prophet, priest, and elder will have no insight to share. That is, there will be no spiritual help forthcoming.
- King and prince will have no insight to share. That is, there will be no political help forthcoming.

The “common people” will suffer because their leaders - both spiritual and secular - have let them down.

If you are called to lead, then know it is an important spiritual activity. Give it everything you’ve got. It doesn’t matter how many or how few are yours to care for. Pour yourself out for them.

If you are a husband, you are called to lead at least your wife. Parents are called to lead their kids.

Does it seem odd that “they will seek a vision from a prophet” but none will be given?

It shouldn’t seem odd. God had been sending them prophets for centuries. They had ignored them. They delayed, they procrastinated, they took things for granted.

The Word of God is so prevalent in our society that it makes it easy to take it for granted. Too many believers have told me over the years how they slipped away from the Word and from church to their own detriment.

We each need to adopt our own disciplined approach to hearing and studying the Word. For me it’s always been to hold Sunday mornings in high regard and to try to get to one other ‘official’ meeting during the week.

Of course it goes without saying that you want to be reading and studying on your own, in your devotions.

The Jews ought to have been “seek[ing] a vision from a prophet” while it was being given. It would have kept them from idolatry and, of course, the discipline of God.

Truth is, if I begin to slip away from my devotions or from my discipline in the Word, I am moving toward idolatry. Whatever it is that is taking my time and attention away from the Word is becoming my idol.

Where is God's Temple today?

Well, He dwells within each of us personally and within all of us corporately. I am the Temple of God; we are the Temple of God.

Let's meet with God and with one another as much as we can in these last days while we await the imminent return of the Lord.

