

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 7:1-27

Topic

Ezekiel dramatized his prophecy making a chain as a prop.

Title

"I Hear The Chain A-comin, It's Comin' Means The End"

"I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and yard by yard."

Recognize the quote? Sure you do. It's Jacob Marley's ghost answering his former partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, who asked it, "You are fettered. Tell me why?"

Charles Dickens based *A Christmas Carol* on the passage in the Gospel of Luke concerning the rich man & Lazarus. He was deeply influenced by Christian teachings, and biblical themes permeate much of his work.

I wonder if he came up with the idea of Marley's chain from reading Ezekiel?

Look at verse twenty-three: "Make a **chain**, For the land is filled with crimes of blood, And the city is full of violence."

Ezekiel went around dragging a chain to signify the inevitable Babylonian invasion of Judea & the captivity of the Jews.

Marley's chain is described as being "made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, and deeds." These items are attached to the chain, rattling as it is dragged along.

The items symbolized Marley's true love - mammon, the wealth of this world.

I suggest that Ezekiel's chain was similarly "made" from things that were symbols of the nation's sins. I think that because Ezekiel provides a list:

1. He mentions their "abominations" (v3, 4, 8, 9 & 20).
2. He mentions "a rod" that blossoms (v10).
3. He mentions their property (v12 & 13).
4. There's a "trumpet" (v14).
5. "Sackcloth" (v18).
6. "Silver & gold" (v19). And,
7. "Ornaments" (v20).

As Ezekiel walked around dragging this chain with stuff attached to it, the Jews had a visual of the things marking their rebellion.

NT believers are once-for-all unchained by virtue of being in Christ. We may, however, still return to things that once held us captive:

- The apostle John wrote, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (First John 5:21).
- The apostle Paul wrote, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (First Thessalonians 4:3).

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The Way You Live Can Show What It Is Like To Be Working For The Lord**, and **#2 The Way You Live Can Show What It Is Like To Be Waiting For The Lord**.

#1 The Way That You Live Can Show What It Is Like To Be Working For The Lord (v1-23)

Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life.

Working for the Lord *isn't work*. It will be physically demanding, emotionally draining, spiritually oppressive. But even if I am chained in a Philippian dungeon, suffering from a thorn in my flesh, I can praise my Lord.

Ezekiel is God's prophet to 6th century Jews who were relocated and resettled in Babylon. He was taken there in the second of three sieges. He was tasked with announcing to the exiles that in the final invasion, Jerusalem and the Temple would be *looted & leveled*.

Two prominent declarations are made in this chapter:

1. God tells them it is "the end" six times, most forcefully in verse six, "An end has come, The end has come; It has dawned for you; Behold, it has come!" He furthermore says "it has come," "doom has come," "the time has come," "a day of trouble is near," "the day draws near," and "destruction comes."
2. Simultaneously God said 3x, "then you shall know that I am the LORD." (We also heard this 4x in chapter six).

Ezk 7:1 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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!

God's longsuffering with their sins was over. Their punishment was determined. Personal repentance was possible, *but it was too late for the nation.*

"I will repay." That's an unusual word choice. A *debtor* repays the lender. God is no debtor, so it can't mean that. The word is also used, *to square accounts*. We say, "Are we square now?"

In the case of the Judean Jews, it meant that they were receiving precisely what they deserved at the hand of God - no more & no less. For example, their captivity would last 70yrs. That was the exact amount of years the Jews owed the LORD for their sin of not letting their land lie unplanted every 7th year.

Twice God calls them out for their "abominations." This was their worship of idols in which they participated in the Gentile rites involving perversions of all manner and child sacrifice.

One of our working definitions for idolatry is *any person, place, or thing* I substitute for the sufficiency of God in my life.

Their fall & their fettering was the discipline of a loving Father. It was severe, but loving. No discipline seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

They would know that He was the LORD on account of His faithfulness to discipline them. It was proof of His love. It would testify to them, and to the Gentile nations, a love so true.

God is either discipling you...or disciplining you.

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

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

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

In the "mountains" you'd find them at shrines, worshipping the idols. Twice more the LORD mentions their "abominations."

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

Ezk 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.

The "rod" represented "pride." In Jerusalem, Jeremiah urged them to submit to Babylon. Had they submitted, they would have been spared. Instead, their pride incited the "violence" of the third invasion.

If you search the Internet for 'how does pride manifest itself,' you'll see that there are seven ways, or 15 ways, or 30 ways. *Do your own digging!* Ask the Lord to show **you** how **you** manifest pride.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

“Sellers returning to what has been sold” is one of the things that occurred during the Jewish Year of Jubilee. Observed every 50th year, was a time when debts were forgiven, enslaved individuals were freed, and ancestral land was returned to its original owners. The captivity in Babylon would last 70yrs. They would miss at least one and possibly two Jubilee years.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

The “trumpet” signified the LORD fighting for them. When Assyria came against them, the Angel of the LORD killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. Not this time.

Ezk 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.

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

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

“Sackcloth” and “baldness” communicated inner shame. These tenderhearted Jews were the remnant, the believing Jews. They could rejoice in their preservation. Nevertheless they were without homes and the prescribed place to worship.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ever since I was a kid, television commercials have hammered me to buy gold. But if a bag of gold is necessary to buy a loaf of Ezekiel bread, am I really rich?

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

We will watch in upcoming chapters as God's glory, the Shekinah, exits the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. Babylonians will enter, defiling it by their mere presence.

We've mentioned previously that the church in Ephesus was warned that they would lose their testimony unless they repented of leaving their first love.

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

Ezekiel lists items from which he 'makes' the chain. Maybe he added them each day to be dramatic. An idol... A budding rod... Maybe a deed to property that was unable to be redeemed... A military trumpet... Sackcloth... and Ornaments. Go through the chapter again & you can discover other items, e.g., a "sword" (v15), "doves" (v16), and "silver" & "gold" (v19).

1. If God told believers to make such a chain to represent what is going on in our country, what objects or items would be attached to it?
2. If God asked you (or I) to make a chain for ourselves, what would we be dragging along?

#2 - The Way You Live Can Show What It Is Like To Be Waiting For The Lord (v24-27)

In disaster movies there is usually a nod to someone holding a sign, **Repent for the end is near!**

This chapter reads as if God's message was more urgent. You come away thinking, "The End is **here!**"

Imminence is living as if the thing the LORD has revealed could occur right now. Scoffers mock us, and thereby God, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" It is being held back by a crazy little thing called love. Specifically the aspect of the Lord's love He describes as longsuffering - His unwillingness that any should perish, but that they receive eternal life.

Ezk 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.

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

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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!' "

"I will do to them according to their way" is an OT version of something we hear in the first chapter of Romans. There the apostle Paul says, 3x, "Therefore God also gave them up..." The LORD reacts to our choices and will give us what we want, to our detriment.

Some scholars see references to the End Times & the 7yr Great Tribulation. Ezekiel has plenty of future stuff... *but not here*. This is all about the Babylonian captivity.

I've mentioned over this past year a move among believers away from the pre-Tribulation resurrection & rapture of the church. Part of their argument is that imminence doesn't mean any-moment. They argue from various texts that imminent means *near*, not *right now*.

It would seem Ezekiel agrees:

➡ He writes, "Behold, it has come! An end has come, The end has come; It has dawned for you; Behold, it has come! Doom has come to you, you who dwell in the land; The time has come."

➡ But he also writes, "A day of trouble *is near*, And not of rejoicing in the mountains. Now upon you I will **soon** pour out My fury."

How is the End both *now* & *near*?

The Lord is suggesting a new way of thinking.

The Lord could come right now... He didn't, so His coming is what? *Nearer than it was a moment ago*.

This has a practical application. The apostle Paul taught the imminent resurrection & rapture of the church to the believers in Thessalonica. A problem arose. There were believers who figured, since the rapture could occur any moment, they should quit

working and wait for the Lord. Over time, they became a burden on the church. Paul responded by saying, *"No work, no eat!"*

I believe it is the teaching of Scripture that the Lord could come any moment to snatch His church to Heaven. As we wait, we are to make plans, pressing forward with the Gospel, because His coming is nearer than before.

Now & nearer...Learn to wait in that dynamic.