EZEKIEL

Chapter 7

*The End Has Come*

**The word of the LORD came to me:  2 “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.  3 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.  4 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. 5 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Disaster! An unheard-of disaster is coming.  6 The end has come! The end has come! It has roused itself against you. It has come!  7 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.  8 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.  9 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. 10 “The day is here! It has come! Doom has burst forth, the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed!  11 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.  12 The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller grieve, for wrath is upon the whole crowd.  13 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.  14 Though they blow the trumpet and get everything ready, no one will go into battle, for my wrath is upon the whole crowd. 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.  16 All who survive and escape will be in the mountains, moaning like doves of the valleys, each because of his sins.  17 Every hand will go limp, and every knee will become as weak as water.  18 They will put on sackcloth and be clothed with terror. Their faces will be covered with shame and their heads will be shaved.  19 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.  20 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.  21 I will hand it all over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked of the earth, and they will defile it.  22 I will turn my face away from them, and they will desecrate my treasured place; robbers will enter it and desecrate it. 23 “Prepare chains, because the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of violence.  24 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.  25 When terror comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none.  26 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.  27 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.”**

**7:1-4** “End!” With this short, anarthrous word (קֵץ in 7:2c), Ezekiel ushers in a chapter with a distinct eschatological, sometimes an almost apocalyptic, flavor. Beginning with chapter 34 that tone will become frequent, but until chapter 7 it has been relatively subdued and only implicit in the book. When “end” is repeated in 7:2, it is with a verb (בָּא, “*has* come”) that is a prophetic perfect, typical of eschatological prophecy. The chapter contains various other words or metaphors that are commonly associated with eschatology, such as “the day” (7:7, 10, 12, 19) and harvest imagery (7:10–11). (CC)

In Dan 8:17, 19, קֵץ (“end”) clearly refers to the eschatological end time. In Ezekiel its import is not quite so precise, but we are close. Perhaps we are at the same point as with the pun in the last of Amos’ visions (Amos 8:1–3) on קֵץ, “end,” and קַיִץ, “ripe summer fruit” (which does not appear in Ezekiel). In Amos 8, the target is primarily the imminent fall of the northern kingdom, but the situation is comparable to Ezekiel’s application to Jerusalem and Judah. How much of a harvest metaphor we should hear in connection with the word “end” is debatable, but the harvest metaphor surfaces clearly in 7:10c–11 and may be implicit in the “joy” of 7:7c. Our idioms of harvest joy (“bringing in the sheaves”) and judgment (the Grim Reaper; see Jer 9:21–22) are both rooted in Scripture. (CC)

Eschatological and apocalyptic implications appear already at the end of 7:2 in “the four corners of the earth [אֶרֶץ].” That phrase is universal in import, in contrast to “the land [אֲדָמָה] of Israel” earlier in the verse. “Land” is earthy in a literal sense (referring to the soil or territory), and its immediate application is to Jerusalem and the rest of “the land of Israel,” but since God’s enemies—the objects of his judgment—are also the heathen nations, a sort of typology is built into the treatment of “the land of Israel.” The doom of unbelieving Israel (“the land”) is a miniature and a portent of the end and judgment of the entire world (“the earth”). The same is true in 7:23, where אֶרֶץ could refer just to the land of Israel, but the language recalls the state of the whole “earth” prior to the universal flood (Gen 6:11, 13). (CC)

Ezekiel was by no means the first prophet to make that linkage between the land of Israel and the whole earth. The oracles of judgment upon the surrounding Gentile nations in Amos 1–2 lead into judgment on Israel and Judah in Amos 3–9. The same kind of connection is implicit in the extended sections of Gentile oracles in many other prophets, including Ezekiel 25–32. The powerful second chapter of Isaiah moves from Israel’s judgment to the condemnation of all human presumption. The inclusion of the world at large is as explicit as can be in Zeph 1:2–18. (CC)

At the same time that it looks forward to the end of the whole world, the “end” of Israel (Ezek 7:2) is also an antitype that looks back to “the end of all flesh” upon the whole “earth” in universal deluge in the days of Noah (Gen 6:13). (Ezekiel will refer to Noah in 14:14, 20.) The Christian can hardly contemplate such passages about the “end” without integrating them with Jesus’ declaration “It is finished/ended” (τετέλεσται, Jn 19:30) on Calvary, where God’s judgment was concentrated on his own Son, who is Israel embodied in one person. At the same time, when the entirety of God’s wrath was “finished/ended” upon his Son, that opened the way of escape for all who confess that his was indeed the judgment they deserved. It is a judgment that is repeated daily in the Christian life of repentance and faith, as we die with Christ to sin and rise with Christ to new life in Baptism, which is the antitype of the flood in the days of Noah (when only eight were saved), and “which also now saves you” (1 Pet 3:21). (CC)

The underlying spiritual and theological problems of the Israelites that Ezekiel addresses are the same problems that have always plagued God’s people and still afflict the church and the unbelieving world today. The human tendency is to embrace one-sidedly God’s promises of salvation for those who believe, while disregarding God’s threat of judgment upon those who do not believe—and to glibly assume, without self-examination, that the divine judgment certainly cannot apply to oneself. (CC)

The other temptation is to relegate the entire subject of the “end” to a far distant, essentially irrelevant time. Not for nothing are the Gospels full of admonitions such as “Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt 25:13). 2 Pet 3:3–4 is the classic passage illustrating how already the early church faced an indifference defended by the delay of the parousia. The modern church, even when relatively orthodox in theory, is notorious for collapsing the Gospel into merely the present, existential moment before God. Empirically, this is obvious when it comes to the usual way we lead our personal lives (living for the moment and as if this life will never end). But if we so easily disregard the inevitable end of our own personal lives, how much easier is it to ignore the cosmic end of all things created? (CC)

Biblical eschatology is always simultaneously existential (vertical) and horizontal (extending from creation to the cross and to the end of the world at Christ’s return). Ezekiel 7 drives home that point by its proclamation of both the people’s existential status *coram Deo* (under his judgment) and the arrival of the “end” already now. (CC)

**7:2** *four corners of the land.* The whole world would be affected by God’s judgment on the land of Israel (see note on 1:5). (CSB)

**7:5-9** In connection with the “end,” 7:7 introduces “the day” (הַיּוֹם), a term that plays a prominent role in biblical thought and that is still evident in theological discourse today. In contexts like this, “the day” (7:7, 10, 12) is shorthand for the likes of “the day of Yahweh’s fury” (7:19) and especially “the Day of Yahweh” (13:5). In poetic parallelism to “the day” we also meet “the time” (הָעֵת, 7:7). In the OT “the time” never took on the theological freight that “the day” did, but in the NT καιρός is quite prominent as a term for the “time” when God acts, either in judgment or salvation or both, for example, the appointed “time” of Christ’s first advent (Mk 1:15), of Christ’s passion (Mt 26:18), of Christ’s second advent (Mk 13:33), of the “harvest” at the end of the world (Mt 13:30), or the time of the final judgment of the demons (Mt 8:29). (CC)

Yahweh’s “day” is a time of encounter with him, the details of which will be determined by him alone. The word may be used of moments of deliverance or salvation (e.g., Is 49:8, quoted in 2 Cor 6:2). And, before we proceed, here is a place to correct the common misunderstanding of “Judgment Day” to the effect that it is only the time of the damnation of the unfaithful. In fact, “judgment” in that phrase is used in the common biblical sense of a “verdict” rendered by a judge. For the believer, then, that day will be the time of God’s public verdict of “not guilty” for Christ’s sake—justification by grace alone and through faith alone in Christ’s vicarious atonement. (CC)

However, more often in biblical usage of “the day,” and certainly in Ezekiel, the accent is on judgment in the sense of condemnation. That was no more congenial an idea to people living in the OT era than it is with many popular conceptions of God today. The clearest evidence for this is in the famous passage Amos 5:18–20. Against popular fantasies, Amos insists that the Day of Yahweh “is darkness and not light, as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him.” (CC)

Ezekiel had many prophetic predecessors besides Amos, so Ezekiel is able to mention “the day” briefly since it was a well-established concept. Isaiah is particularly rich in his development of it. Much of Isaiah 2 (especially 2:12–22) speaks of the exaltation of Yahweh’s “day” over everything “that is proud and lofty … lifted up and high.” The common treasury of language and imagery throughout Ezekiel 7 is even closer to Is 13:1–6, a Gentile oracle against Babylon, which in Ezekiel 7 is recycled against Israel. Stylistic and conceptual links to Ezekiel 7 are also clear in Zeph 1:14–16, which is the basis of the famous medieval hymn *Dies irae*, “Day of Wrath” (*TLH* 607).

Ezekiel 7 speaks only of “the day” (7:7, 10, 12) and “the day of Yahweh’s fury” (7:19), but throughout the prophets there are many variant expressions with the same import. Often it is simply “that day” (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא, e.g., Is 2:11, 17, 20) or “those days” (e.g., הָהֵם הַיָּמִים, Jer 31:33) or “the last days” (אַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים, e.g., Is 2:2). “Day” may be in construct with נָקָם, when it is usually translated as “day of vengeance,” but better would be “day of vindication” (Is 34:8; 61:2; 63:4). Sometimes “day” is in construct with a name that refers to a specific historical divine intervention, such as “the day of Egypt” (Ezek 30:9); “the day of Jezreel” (Hos 1:11); or “the day of Midian” (Is 9:3). Sometimes Yahweh’s day is the time when he will offer a זֶבַח (“sacrifice; peace offering; sacrificial meal”), as in Zeph 1:7–8, where Israel itself will be sacrificed; compare Is 34:6; Jer 46:10; and, more positively, Ezek 39:17. (CC)

**7:7** *the day.*† The day of the Lord. Beginning with Amos (Am 5:18–20), that day is seen by all the prophets as a day of great judgment, tinged at times with the colors and configurations of the final day of judgment which will bring “the end of all things” (1Pe 4:7). (CSB)

*panic, not joy.* Cf. Am 5:20 (“darkness, not light”). (CSB)

**7:8** *pour out my wrath.* A common expression in Ezekiel (see 9:8; 14:19; 20:8, 13, 21; 22:31; 30:15; 36:18). (CSB)

**7:10** I AM THE LORD – To the recognition formula (“then you will know that I, Yahweh”) is added the predicate participle “am the smiter.” That underscores the same point made in earlier passages: Yahweh himself has become the enemy—not because he has abandoned his covenant promise, but because Israel has abandoned it. In Is 53:4 God uses the corresponding passive participle (Hophal of נָכָה) of the (Hiphil) active participle here to declare that the Suffering Servant is the one who is “smitten”: (CC)

Truly he bore our sicknesses

      and carried our pains,

but we had deemed him stricken,

*smitten* by God and afflicted.

Christ is Israel embodied in one man. He was “smitten” as he suffered the sum total of the punishment for humanity’s sin meted out by “Yahweh … the smiter.” The apparent paradox between Is 53:4 and Ezek 7:9 is resolved only by Christ on the cross. The *Agnus Dei* bears the iniquity of us all. (CC)

**7:12** *Let not the buyer rejoice.* End-time advice similar to that of Jesus (see Mt 24:17–18). (CSB)

The effects of God’s wrath are highlighted. First is the collapse of all commercial and business life. That topic recurs in 7:19. A buyer would not be able to rejoice in any bargain he has found, nor will the seller lament any poor transaction, because in the catastrophe both will lose all. There is not even the possibility of economic rebalancing during the Jubilee Year. (CC)

Even in the ordinary course of human affairs, the possibility of divine intervention makes all commercial and financial plans contingent upon his will (*Deo volente*, James 4:13–15). How much more is this true when projected upon an eschatological screen (cf. Mt 24:40–41 || Lk 17:34–35). (CC)

**7:14-15** The thought now shifts to the futility of human preparations in the face of the devastating judgment. The people may plan to fight back, but when they sound the trumpet, calling their forces to do battle, they will be so petrified that they will be unable to mount any significant resistance to the agent of God’s judgment. The trio of “sword,” “plague,” and “famine” from chapter 5 (5:12, 17) reappear and overtake them all. (CC)

**7:16-18** As in 5:3–4, again the door is left slightly ajar to accommodate the possibility of a handful of survivors who manage to escape. But those who make it to the mountains exist in almost a living death, “all of them moaning” (7:16), and the following verses will expand that thought. The last phrase of 7:16, “each in his iniquity,” will not let us forget the real problem: the people’s sin, which they cannot escape. They may bemoan their guilt, but are not about to repent of it. All will be involved, but the theme of individual accountability, which Ezekiel will later accent so strongly (especially chapter 18), also makes an appearance here (“each in *his* iniquity”). (CC)

**7:19** *They will throw their silver.* See Isa 2:20. (CSB)

Materialism is by no means only a modern malady, since it is endemic to the fallen human condition. As this and the following verse make plain, it always entails idolatry: the worship of the created instead of the Creator. The culpability is even greater for recipients of divine revelation; “everyone to whom is given much, much shall be required from him” (Lk 12:48). As an “-ism” intrinsically at odds with God’s plan of redemption, materialism inevitably triggers God’s wrath. It is not merely a closed-circuited, this-worldly human conclusion that a person’s deepest needs cannot be satisfied by the “abundance of things he possesses” (Lk 12:15), but materialism is an orientation that brings judgment, unless repented of and forgiven. (CC)

As usual in Ezekiel, the judgment (“the day of Yahweh’s fury,” 7:19) will find an immediate fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 b.c. But eschatological overtones are implicit, as the church recognizes in its use of the *dies irae* theme in its hymnody and liturgy. (CC)

Also as usual in Ezekiel, English translations soften the impact of the Hebrew terminology. The “unclean thing” (7:19–20) that their gold will become has its roots in the ceremonial laws of uncleanness, especially for menstruation (see the textual notes on 7:19). The ceremonial (and civil) laws of the OT cannot be taken over mechanically by the NT church, but the moral laws do apply to the church. However, the OT itself often does not make a clear-cut distinction between the ceremonial and the moral. Already in the OT (as in 7:19–20; 36:17), the vocabulary of “unclean(ness)” is used in a broader theological sense, and in the NT uncleanness/impurity results not only from sexual immorality, but also from greed and idolatry. To regard material goods as containing no intrinsic worth apart from the Giver of all good gifts (James 1:17) may at least be the first step in praise and thanksgiving before God. The final clause in Ezek 7:19 is virtually a paraphrase of the well-known dictum of St. Paul in 1 Tim 6:10: “The love of money is a root of all evils.” (CC)

**7:20** *beautiful jewelry.* See Ex 32:2–4. (CSB)

Whatever the precise force of this difficult verse, it is a reminder of how easily God’s gifts are not received with thanksgiving, but become ultimate ends or pursuits, that is, become idols. If my reading of the verse is correct (see the textual notes), it describes how the Israelites used gold and silver from God’s temple as the precious metals from which they fashioned their idols. The same thing, spiritually if not literally, can be done by Christians in the church. The visible church can easily be turned into a caricature of what God intends by that highest of all gifts—his indwelling presence in the person of Christ. The Christian’s very body too is a temple that is defiled by immorality (1 Cor 6:9–20). *Corruptio optimi pessima*, “the corruption of the best is the worst of all.” (CC)

**7:21-27** The rest of the chapter continues to paint in the blackest colors Israel’s estrangement from God’s redemptive intent so that the only remaining outcome is his *opus alienum*, his “alien/strange work,” that is, executing judgment according to his Law. “Foreigners” (unbelievers) and “the most wicked people of the earth” (7:21; cf. 7:24) will possess and then inevitably desecrate what God had called and made holy. The people’s pride in what they should have been ashamed of will turn into utter chaos and despair as they stare into the abyss. As King Saul once sought in vain for a word from God (1 Sam 28:6), so will they, but the point of no return has been passed; they have no true repentance or faith in God’s promises. (CC)

The antepenultimate and penultimate clauses of the chapter are chilling (“According to their own conduct I will deal with them, and by their own judgments I will judge them,” 7:27). These are clear statements of Law for all who would be saved by the Law (see Rev 20:12–13). “And Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day” (Is 2:11). (CC)

**7:22** *my treasured place.* The Jerusalem temple. (CSB)

**7:24** *pride of the mighty.* The Jerusalem temple, described by the word “pride” (as in 24:21; 33:28). (CSB)

**7:26** *prophet … priest … elders.* There would be no guidance from God and no direction from the elders (see 1Sa 28:6; Am 8:11–12; Mic 3:6–7). (CSB)

**7:27** *king … prince.*† Here both nouns describe the same person. (CSB)

*people of the land.* Full citizens of Judah who owned land and served in the army (cf. 12:19; 45:16, 22; 46:3). (CSB)