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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

Ezekiel 20.

(2014)

The Bible not only reveals God's eternal plans purposes and promises

But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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Ezekiel 20.

Topics.

- The history of Israel.
- Israel's fathers rebelled against God in Egypt.
- Israel's fathers rebelled against God in the wilderness.
- The children of the wilderness generation rebelled against God.
- Israel in the Promised Land rebelled against God.
- The inhabitants of Jerusalem were sacrificing their children in fire.
- The rebellious mind of the house of Israel.
- The LORD will be king over Israel.
- God will accept his people at Jerusalem.
- The LORD will kindle a fire in Negeb.

Introduction to the Book of Ezekiel: Ezekiel, a prophet and priest, was exiled to Babylon in 597 B.C. His ministry extended over at least twenty-three years. The book opens with his first dramatic vision of the “likeness” of the LORD”. Ezekiel was keenly aware of God’s presence and power in human affairs. He addressed both the exiles and the people left in Judah with messages of warning and judgment, predicting the fall of Jerusalem.

After its fall (586), Ezekiel prophesied of hope and reassurance for the people of Judah, who had then lost the focus of God’s covenant and the temple in Jerusalem. His vision of the valley of dry bones (ch. 37) is a classic picture of God’s ability to breathe new life into those who are spiritually dead. Ezekiel is prophesying about the Jews that did not go into captivity to Babylon, but remained against the word of the LORD in Jerusalem.

NOTE: Ezekiel’s message is primarily directed to the people in the land of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the two tribes), but often it is difficult to separate the message from Judah and Israel (the ten tribes) because much of what the LORD says can be applied to both Judah and Israel because the two are so intertwined and both nations were guilty of the same gross sins.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: “Map Locations and People of the Bible,” and the title: “Bible Dictionary” on Website Menu.

The Seventh Year of Babylonian Captivity.

Ezekiel 20:1 ----- ¹In *the seventh year*, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.

This is the seventh year Ezekiel has been in captivity and some of the elders of Judah come and sit before him.

Ezekiel 20:2-4 ----- ²And the word of the LORD came to me: ³Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you. ⁴Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers,

The elders have come to ask questions of Ezekiel, but God basically says they have no right to come ask questions of God and tells Ezekiel to tell them of all the sins of their fathers.

The History of Israel.

Ezekiel 20:5-7 ----- ⁵and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. ⁶On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. ⁷And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

Ezekiel tells the elders that God delivered Israel from the slavery and the bondage of Egypt into the most glorious of all lands and told them to destroy all idols and altars of other gods and not to defile themselves with them.

Israel's Fathers Rebelled against God in Egypt.

Ezekiel 20:8-12 ----- ⁸But they (the fathers of Israel) rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. ⁹But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁰So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. ¹¹I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. ¹²Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

NOTICE: even when Israel was in Egypt they rebelled against the LORD, so much so that he thought of destroying them while they were in Egypt, but because the Egyptians knew they were Gods' people He delivered them to protect His name. Had the LORD destroyed the Hebrews Egypt would have boasted that their gods protected and cared more about them than the God of the Hebrews cared about His people.

The lesson for today: everyone who confesses to know God or His Son the Lord Jesus Christ represents His Holy name on earth and to the people they are amongst. God values His good name a name that embraces love, kindness, forgiveness doing right and treating other humans with respect. When we treat others with disrespect and injustice it brings a bad testimony to the name of God.

God desires that all people will turn from their wickedness to Him and be granted everlasting life. He does not delight in the death of anyone who dies without eternal life. Obviously our bad behaviour and lack of treating others with kindness will turn people away from God and away from the Lord Jesus Christ rather than toward them and that is why He treasures His name so much.

Israel's Fathers Rebelled against God in the Wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:13-17 ----- ¹³But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. ¹⁴But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. ¹⁵Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, ¹⁶because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. ¹⁷Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.

Even in the wilderness Israel rebelled against the LORD and He once again thought of destroying them, but so that His name would not be profaned by the surrounding nations saying, "Israel's God bought them out into the wilderness so that He could destroy them," God did not make a full end of Israel.

The Children of the Wilderness Generation Rebelled against God.

Ezekiel 20:18-22 ----- ¹⁸And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, ²⁰and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God. ²¹But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. ²²But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.

Even in the children of the wilderness generation rebelled against the LORD and He once again thought of destroying Israel, but so that His name would not be profaned by the surrounding nations He withheld His hand.

The Children of the Wilderness Generation Rebelled against God continued: -

Ezekiel 20:23-26 ----- ²³Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, ²⁴because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols. ²⁵Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, ²⁶and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD.

Offering up all their firstborn: did not mean offer them on an altar to be sacrificed to the LORD, it meant they were given for life to the temple to serve as a priest in the House of God.

I defiled them through their gifts in offering up all their firstborn means: -

- I caused them grief and sorrow.
- God later changed this law and chose the tribe of Levi to be priests.

Rules by which they could not have life most likely means: -

- They could not enjoy the life of their firstborn child.

God introduced this law because of Israel's rebellion, and so that they would not forget the LORD their God. Perhaps (and I say perhaps) the LORD'S thinking was; if the priesthood of the temple of God was full of Israel's firstborn children it would keep the parents minds focused toward the House of God and on God Himself and the child would grow up in the teachings and ways of the LORD from birth.

Israel in the Promised Land Rebelled against God.

Ezekiel 20:27-29 ----- ²⁷Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: In this also your fathers blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me. ²⁸For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing aromas, and there they poured out their drink offerings. ²⁹(I said to them, What is the high place to which you go? So its name is called Bamah to this day.).

Bamah: (Bamowth) from Strong's Concordance refers to the heights of Baal.

Following are the sins that permeated the land of Israel: -

- Gross idolatry and Baal altars.
- Asherim worship, a goddess of love and fertility (her worship was indecent and sexual in an offensive way).
- Acknowledgement of the deity of Moloch and Israel's children sacrificed to him in the Hinnom Valley.
- Altars for worshipping the sun, moon, stars and the host of heaven were set up in the temple court for planetary worship.
- Worship of Idols at altars that had been built under shady trees on their hills.
- Innocent people were killed and cheated out of justice.
- Leaders oppressed others for their own selfish gain.
- Drunkenness, violence, robbery and gross sensuality.
- The rich cheated the innocent out of justice, and showed no sense of responsibility towards the poor instead of relieving their economic distress they devised new means of depriving them of their property.

This idol worship and indiscriminate, indulgent and excessive luxurious living resulted in the division and decay of social unity in the land of Judah (the two tribes at Jerusalem) and Israel (the ten tribes in the land of Samaria).

THE FOCUS IS NOW EZEKIEL AND THE ELDERS.

Ezekiel 20:30 ----- ³⁰Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things?

The focus has now returned back to Ezekiel and the elders sitting before him who had come to ask questions of God. The LORD by His Spirit is speaking through Ezekiel to the elders and referring to them as the House of Israel simply because that is who they represent (v1-4).

The Inhabitants of Jerusalem were Sacrificing their Children in Fire.

Ezekiel 20:31 ----- ³¹When you (the House of Israel) present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.

When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon first attacked Jerusalem he only took the people of influence into captivity and left everyone else at Jerusalem. This is the seventh year Ezekiel and the elders have been in captivity to Babylon (v1). Those who were left at Jerusalem are still sacrificing their children in fire.

Sacrificing their children in fire: refers to the statue of Molech which stood in the valley of (the son of) Hinnom (the Hebrew word for Gehenna) which was a valley of Jerusalem. Molech was so tall that he appeared as if he were staring down from a throne of brass. Fire in the pit beneath the hollow statute would blaze with a loud roar, tongues of flame would reach up and lick around the edges of Molech's open mouth and a column of smoke would billow high into the air and be seen from some distance. The arms of Molech reached upward and out as if waiting to be filled they formed a steep incline that ended in Molech's open mouth.

Priests would bring a child to be sacrificed to Molech and chant, Molech, Molech, Molech and the frenzied crowd would also chant Molech, Molech, Molech to the throbbing beat of drums. While the priests and the crowd chanted to the pounding rhythm of drums, the chief priest faced Molech with his arms raised, pleading with the god in a frenzied cry, when the chief priest finished his prayer, he would lower his arms and lift the child sacrifice in the air. The chief priest would then toss the child into the monsters waiting arms the child would roll down the hot and smoothly polished arms and into Molech's open mouth and the roaring fire and flames would devour the sacrificial child.

In the New Testament Gehenna the Valley of Hinnon where the statute of Molech stood became a very appropriate symbol for the horror and total destruction of the human body, soul and spirit. How God must have wept as His heart was torn in grief as He looked down on His people doing such cruel and horrific things to the LORD'S Children, is it any wonder that He was angry and forced to judge and punish the nation.

The Rebellious Mind of the House of Israel.

Ezekiel 20:32 ----- ³²What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'

This is amazing, but tragic: God's people Israel desire to be like the nations surrounding them they want to follow their gods and worship their idols (blocks of wood).

The lesson for today: when those who love God live amongst people whose lives appear to be better than theirs, there is a danger that they begin to lose sight of God and the things He values and seek after the lifestyle they have (i.e. worldly success, riches wealth and material possessions).

NOTE: there is nothing wrong in these things in themselves, but if they begin to entice a person on an upward climb according worldly standards and at the same time seductively draw them away from God and the things He values they then have the power to lead a person to eternal destruction.

The LORD will be King over Israel.

Ezekiel 20:33-39 ----- ³³As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you. ³⁴I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. ³⁵And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord GOD. ³⁷I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. ³⁸I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD. ³⁹"As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols.

The LORD says He will: -

- Be king over Israel.
- Bring Israel into Babylon and judge them face to face.
- Make Israel pass under the rod (oppression of Babylon) and bring them into the bond of the covenant.
- Deliver Israel from Babylon and gather them out of the countries where they are scattered.
- Purge out the rebels from among Israel and those who transgress against the LORD.

The LORD achieved all this while Israel and Judah were under Babylon dominion for seventy years. Babylon invaded Jerusalem and took its inhabitants (the two tribes of Judah) into captivity later Babylon conquered Assyria who had previously taken Israel (the ten tribes in the land of Samaria) captive. Israel and Judah were under Babylonian rule for seventy years. They went into captivity to Babylon as two rebellious nations who had turned from God to idols and who were even sacrificing their own children to pagan gods.

While in captivity God moulded them like a master potter moulds a beautiful clay jar. They went into Babylon as two unfaithful nations that had turned away from the LORD to idols and other gods. Seventy years later, Cyrus (King of Persia) who the LORD called His Shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) gave permission to Israel to return to Jerusalem.

Under Ezra and Nehemiah God brought Israel back to their beloved city Jerusalem as one nation faithful to only one God, the LORD their God, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Israel never turned to pagan gods again).

God will accept His People at Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 20:40-44 ----- ⁴⁰For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. ⁴¹As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. ⁴²And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers. ⁴³And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. ⁴⁴And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.

The LORD says, when He brings Israel back to Jerusalem He will: -

- Bring them into their own land.
- Establish their temple service on His Holy Mountain and in their land.
- Accept them, their gifts and their sacred offerings.
- Manifest His holiness among them in the sight of all the nations.

The LORD also says, the people of Israel will: -

- Know that the LORD is their God (contrasted to worshipping many gods).
- Remember all the ways in which they defiled themselves and loathe themselves.

NOTICE: the LORD is not going to deal with Israel according to their wickedness, but for His name sake.

Lesson for today: if we desire to win the LORD'S favour, protect His good name don't treat other people in ways that will cause them to think badly of God.

The LORD will Kindle a Fire in Negeb.

Ezekiel 20:45-49 ----- ⁴⁵the word of the LORD came to me: ⁴⁶"Son of man, set your face toward the southland; preach against the south, and prophesy against the forest land in the Negeb. ⁴⁷Say to the forest of the Negeb, Hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. ⁴⁸All flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it; it shall not be quenched." ⁴⁹Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not a maker of parables?'"

Negeb: is a desert region lying to the south of Judea between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem a group of Jews retreated to the Negeb (so it is not too far away from Jerusalem). Ezekiel is told to prophecy against the forest land in the Negeb and says to it God will kindle a fire in its forest lands that will devour the green trees and scorch the people in the north and the south.

In about three years-time Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marches his armies across countries to attack and destroy Jerusalem, when they enter the city they burn the houses, slaughter the soldiers, pillaged the temple and take its inhabitants in chains to Babylon.

End.