

Ezekiel Chapter 20 Continued

Ezekiel 20:27 "Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me."

Ezekiel had been relating to the elders about the sins of the children of Israel from the very beginning. Now this is directed, not to the elders specifically, but to all of Israel. This is as if God is saying, in all these years, you have not changed. The fathers, from the very beginning, had blasphemed God in their worship of false gods. They are still doing the very same thing.

Even in the captivity in Babylon, these elders were still seeking advice from the false prophets, while they sought advice from Ezekiel. They were not faithful to God.

Ezekiel 20:28 "[For] when I had brought them into the land, [for] the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savor, and poured out there their drink offerings."

In the beautiful Promised Land that God had given them, they did not rejoice in the beauty of the hills and the trees as being gifts from God. They began their false worship all over again. They worshipped false gods in the high places, and under the thick trees. It seemed everything they saw, caused them to seek the worship of false gods. The sweet savor and the drink offerings were to be for God alone. To burn incense to a false god, is blasphemy in the sight of God.

Ezekiel 20:29 "Then I said unto them, What [is] the high place whereunto ye go? And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day."

"Bamah" means in ancient Israel or Canaan, a shrine built on an elevated site. For Canaanites, the shrines were devoted to fertility deities, to the Baals, or to the Semitic goddesses called the Asheroth. The shrines often included an altar and a sacred object such as a stone pillar or wooden pole. One of the oldest known high places (dating from ca. 2500 B.C.), is at Megiddo. And we all know what happens at Megiddo.

The high places, during the time of the temple, were places where they met and worshipped false gods. The worship in the high places was a very sensuous type of worship. Many times, it included physical adultery, as well as spiritual adultery.

Ezekiel 20:30 Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations?"

This is saying that they have never changed. They are still involved in this very same type of sensual worship their fathers were involved in. It seems all of the chastisements God has sent upon them, has not caused them to stop worshipping false gods.

Ezekiel 20:31 "For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? [As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you."

It seemed the worship of Molech was prominent on God's mind. He not only removed Himself from the temple and destroyed it, but He has removed Himself from the presence of these idolatrous people as well. God will not listen to them. He has turned His back to them.

Ezekiel 20:32 "And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone."

They had decided, since they were in exile, and since the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, they could go ahead and worship the false gods. They thought the law left, when the temple was destroyed. What they did not realize, was that to belong to God is a relationship, not a religion.

Ezekiel 20:33 "[As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you:"

God wanted to rule them with His love as a husband to them. They were not faithful, so He will rule them with a rod of iron, in His fury. The "stretched out arm" shows God's judgment.

Ezekiel 20:34 "And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out."

Paul alludes to this (in 2 Cor.).

2 Cor. 6:17. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean [thing]; and I will receive you," "And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

God will someday rule over Israel in the glorious kingdom of Messiah, after the people have repented and been saved.

Ezekiel 20:35 "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face."

Other lands where the scattered people of Israel live are pictured as a wilderness in which the Jews will suffer.

This is analogous to God's bringing His people from Egypt through the wilderness long ago, before thrusting them in the Promised Land.

Ezekiel 20:36 "Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD."

The wilderness wanderings had been a series of problems. Every time they turned from God to false gods, the problems began. They would repent, and God would start them again. It was a series of lessons to be learned. This will be no different. The hardships will be great enough, to cause some to repent and seek God.

Ezekiel 20:37 "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:"

God used a shepherd figure here, apt since He was their Great Shepherd. As a shepherd, God brings His sheep home to their fold, has them file in, separating sheep from goats, passing under His shepherd's rod to be noted and checked for injury.

He will bring them into the bond of the New Covenant by giving them His Spirit with life. This is Israel's final salvation (see Romans 11:26-33).

Ezekiel 20:38 "And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I [am] the LORD."

The "purging" is a separation of the chaff from the wheat, or a separating of the sheep from the goats. God's remnant will be made up of those who do not bow their knees to a false god. Only this pure remnant will go back into the Promised Land. God is the one who separates them. He judges by what is in their hearts.

God will see that no rebel, no one without the renewing by His Spirit in salvation, will come back to Palestine to have a part in the messianic kingdom. All whom He permits to return will serve Him in contrast to those who serve idols. The purging takes place during the "time of Jacob's trouble" during the Great Tribulation.

Ezekiel 20:39 "As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter [also], if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols."

God is saying, decide who you will serve, this day. If you are determined to worship idols and false gods, then go on and serve them. Do not come back to me. Do not pretend to worship me, if you are still worshipping false gods. God will only accept the worship of those who worship Him alone. He will not be one of many gods. He is the Almighty God. There is no other.

Verses 40-42: "all...in the land". The promised regathering in Messiah's earthly kingdom is to the very same land, literally Palestine, from which they were scattered, expressly the land given to their fathers.

They will "all" be there, repentant and saved, serving the Lord wholeheartedly, a united nation engaged in purified worship.

Ezekiel 20:40 "For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things."

In the Jerusalem that is restored, there will be no worship of false gods. The One True God will be worshipped. The temple will be restored. Their offerings and oblations will be acceptable unto Him, because they will worship Him with all their hearts.

Ezekiel 20:41 "I will accept you with your sweet savor, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen."

The sweet savor in that day, will not be of obligation, but because of their love for God. Their hearts will be in their sweet savor offerings. In fact, they will love so much, it will be difficult to separate them from their offerings. God will bring them home to their Promised Land from all the places they have been scattered. There will be a sign to the heathen everywhere, that they worship the One True God.

Ezekiel 20:42 "And ye shall know that I [am] the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country [for] the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers."

This is a promise of the restoration of the Promised Land to them. Even more than that, it is a promise of God restoring covenant relationship with them. He will be their God, and they will be His people.

Those who believe that the church has replaced Israel for his special blessing should read this scripture carefully.

Ezekiel 20:43 "And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed."

This speaks of a deeply repentant people for the sorrow they had caused, by their worship of false gods. When they remember their sins, they will hate themselves for the sins.

Ezekiel 20:44 "And ye shall know that I [am] the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD."

Notice the culmination of this in the fact, that they will now know that He is the LORD. This restoration is for the sake of God, as well as man. This restoration is not because they are worthy, but because He is worthy. God has forgiven them, and restored them to fellowship with Him. Every promise that God made to Abraham, will be because of God's faith. God is Truth. He said it, He will do it.

Ezekiel 20:45-46 "Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying," "Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop [thy word] toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field;"

This is a momentary break in the previous sermon of Ezekiel.

Verses 46-48 ... Preach against the South. The South is Palestine, particularly Judah, usually invaded from the North through Babylonia was to the East. Its army would swing West toward the Mediterranean Sea and then come South out of the North to invade Judah.

The invader, Nebuchadnezzar (in 586 B.C.), will overwhelm the land as a sweeping fire devouring trees indiscriminately, green or dry. Palestine had much more "forest" in biblical times.

Ezekiel 20:47 "And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein."

"I will kindle a fire". This parable of the forest that is consumed by fire metaphorically speaks of fires of judgment, sweeping through the land in the form of the Babylonian invaders, like a mighty forest fire which cannot be quenched. Compare the fiery future devastation yet to affect the Middle East and the world (as forecast in Rev. 9:14-18).

Ezekiel 20:48 "And all flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it: it shall not be quenched."

There will be no doubt from anyone that the destruction that comes, is from a judgment of God. No one, except God, can stop fire that He starts.

Ezekiel 20:49 "Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?"

Certainly, all prophecy is somewhat of a parable. Each Scripture in the Bible is a parable, in the sense that there is a deeper message than the one we see with our physical eye. It does not mean that the message that we see with our physical eye is not true. It just means that, if we pray and ask God to reveal to us the meaning of the parable, He will reveal to us the spiritual meaning of the Scripture, as well as the literal.

Ezekiel spoke Truth that God put into His mouth.

This verse clearly demonstrates the elders' refusal to comprehend Ezekiel's clear message. To the unwilling heart, there was no understanding.

Ezekiel Chapter 20 Continued Questions

1. Who is the prophecy, beginning here, speaking to?
2. What is it as if God is saying?
3. Instead of seeing God's blessings when they looked at the Promised Land, what did they see?
4. The sweet savor and the drink offerings were for _____ alone.
5. What does "Bamah" mean?
6. What were the high places, at the time of the temple?
7. What kind of sin was going on in the high places?
8. What false god required the walking of the children through fire?
9. What had God done, besides remove Himself from the temple?
10. The families of the countries served _____ and _____.
11. When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, they decided it was alright to do what?
12. To belong to God is a _____, not a religion.
13. How had God preferred to rule them?
14. When they were unfaithful, how did He rule them?
15. What does His "stretched out arm" show?
16. What kind of wilderness is this speaking of?
17. The hardships will be just great enough to cause them to _____ and _____ God.
18. What is the "rod" of verse 37?
19. What is the "purging" of verse 38.
20. What does God tell them to go ahead and do, in verse 39?
21. What is different about the restored Jerusalem?
22. Where will He gather them from?
23. He will be their _____, and they will be His _____.
24. He restored them not because they were worthy, but why?
25. When they look back at their sins, what will they think of themselves?

26. What is the meaning of the three mentions of south in verse 46?
27. Who is the "forest" in verse 47?
28. What does the author think about the Bible and parables?