

Ezekiel Chapter 20

In this chapter Ezekiel gives a panoramic view of the history of Israel.

It is in two parts: her rebellious past (in verses 1-31), then her glorious future (in verses 32-44).

The first part surveys all that the LORD had done for the nation, and the nation's sorely inadequate response.

So wicked had the Israelites become, that God gave them over to their own evil practices in the hope that a sense of horror at their own deeds would shock them into repentance.

The mood changes dramatically (at verse 33 where), in a series of the words "I will", the LORD promises what He will accomplish on behalf of His people.

The final verse summarizes the spiritual changes that will transpire: "Ye shall know that I am the LORD" (verse 44).

This can be fulfilled only in the Millennium, when such spiritual transformations are wrought.

Ezekiel 20:1 "And it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth [month], the tenth [day] of the month, [that] certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of the LORD, and sat before me."

We can see from this that Ezekiel's prophecy has gone several years now.

The elders have come to inquire of him, how soon the siege on Judah and Jerusalem would be over, and when they could go back to their homeland?

It appears this is about the time that many of the false prophets are saying the siege and captivity is to be over very soon.

This is exactly what they want to hear from Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 20:2-3 "Then came the word of the LORD unto me, saying," "Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye come to enquire of me? [As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you."

It appears from this, that God promptly answered Ezekiel, when the elders inquired of Him.

God is angered with these elders.

He does not even like them inquiring of Him.

They had, probably, been listening to all the prophets, false and true.

They had not been eager in the past to take instruction from God on their conduct.

He will not help them figure out the time, or the seasons.

They had been stiff-necked people.

God refuses to tell them the time, or season.

Ezekiel 20:4 "Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge [them]? cause them to know the abominations of their fathers:"

Son of man is speaking of Ezekiel.

God tells Ezekiel to judge them.

God wants Ezekiel to remember their sins, and their father's sins that had gotten them in this place.

Their sins had caused the captivity.

God will not answer their inquiry.

God answers the request of those who are righteous, not those who have committed so many abominations.

"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much".

Ezekiel 20:5 "And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I [am] the LORD your God;"

God reminds them of the bondage in Egypt of about 400 years.

He had finally heard their prayers, and brought them out of bondage with the 10 plagues on Egypt.

This is the moment that Israel had become a nation.

God took the 12 sons of Jacob, and made the nation Israel from them and their families.

Ezekiel 20:6 "In the day [that] I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which [is] the glory of all lands:"

God reminds them here, that the Promised Land was a land of milk and honey.

It was a very desirable land.

They did nothing to earn it.

God gave it to them and their families.

Ezekiel 20:7 "Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I [am] the LORD your God."

God had promised them, during their wilderness wanderings, if they would worship Him alone and keep His commandments, the Promised Land would be theirs forever.

They were not to be like the other countries of the earth, worshipping false gods.

They were to be a separate people, who worshipped only the One True God.

They were to be an example for the rest of the world.

They had been warned from the beginning, that to worship idols would bring a curse upon them.

Ezekiel 20:8 "But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt."

The idols of Egypt, here, could be speaking of the type of idols the Egyptians worshipped.

We do know, they built a golden calf while Moses was on the mountain receiving the 10 commandments.

This is the very thing they had been doing just prior to this capture by the Babylonians.

They were making idols of silver and gold, which were abominations in the sight of God.

Sometimes, Egypt speaks of the world, instead of the literal nation of Egypt.

It matters not, where this was.

They disobeyed God.

Perhaps during the 400 years of captivity, they had taken up the Egyptian false gods.

We do know that the 10 plagues showed the world that false gods of all kinds have no power in the face of Almighty God.

God defamed them all.

Ezekiel 20:9 "But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they [were], in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt."

As much as for the Israelites sake, God brought them out of Egypt for the world to know He is God.

All of the nations around were amazed at the 10 plagues.

Even the Egyptian's believed that Almighty God was God, after the plagues.

They knew their idols had no power against God.

Many nations knew of the Red sea parting, and the death of the Egyptians in the Red sea.

Ezekiel 20:10 "Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness."

The wilderness wanderings should have taken just a very short time.

It was extended, because God was trying to prepare His people.

During their wanderings, He gave them His law.

Their lack of faith had to be dealt with, before He could allow them to take over the Promised Land.

He taught them of His special care of them, when He rained Manna from heaven for them to eat.

The wilderness wanderings were necessary to get the ways of Egypt out of them.

Ezekiel 20:11 "And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which [if] a man do, he shall even live in them."

This is speaking, not only of the Ten Commandments, but of the ordinances that would help them live productive lives.

They did not have to have civil laws.

They were covered in the ordinances God had given them while they were in the wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:12 "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I [am] the LORD that sanctify them."

The Sabbath was a special sign for them from God.

This was a witness to them, and the rest of the world, of their special relationship with God.

"Sanctify" means to set apart or set aside for God's purpose.

Ezekiel 20:13 "But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which [if] a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them."

They were a rebellious house.

They polluted the Sabbath, but this probably, includes other sins like the making of the golden calf.

They did not like the ordinances.

They thought of the sacrifices as obligation, and did not do them for love of God, but because of obligation.

Their hearts were far from God.

They went through the motion of worship, but did not really love and reverence God.

Ezekiel 20:14 "But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out."

When Moses begged for their lives on the mountain, one of the reasons he gave God for not destroying them, was that the heathen would see it.

God saved them for Him a family, but He, also, saved them as a sign to the heathen.

Ezekiel 20:15 "Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given [them], flowing with milk and honey, which [is] the glory of all lands;"

God delayed their entering the Promised Land, because of their unfaithfulness.

Ezekiel 20:16 "Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols."

Outwardly, they had given up their idols, but in their hearts, they were far away from God.

At every little problem that arose, they would express desire to be back in Egypt.

The Sabbath was partially made for them to have a day of rest, but they did not see that.

They thought of God as a taskmaster.

Ezekiel 20:17 "Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness."

God let them wander, until the disobedient died off, and gave the Promised Land to their children.

He kept them alive in their children.

Ezekiel 20:18 "But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols:"

God started with this group, because they did not have the memories of Egypt.

They learned the ways of God in the wilderness, and lived by His ordinances.

Ezekiel 20:19 "I [am] the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them;"

The best reason of all for keeping the statutes and judgments is right here.

He is the LORD your God.

Ezekiel 20:20 "And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I [am] the LORD your God."

The Sabbath was a sign that set them aside as the people of God's law.

Christians observing the First day of the week, instead of the seventh, shows the new covenant of grace.

We are practicing firstfruits when we worship on Sunday.

Ezekiel 20:21 "Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which [if] a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness."

It seems that each generation of these Israelites rebel against God, and follow after the idols of Egypt.

Some of this happens, because they intermarried with the world.

They pick up the ways of the world from these marriages.

From this we see also, that their fathers had worshipped false gods in front of them, and they had picked up the false gods of their fathers.

Ezekiel 20:22 "Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth."

God will not destroy them, because they are an example to the heathen.

In this particular instance, God saves them for the benefit of the heathen who had been watching.

Ezekiel 20:23 "I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries;"

One of the punishments God does is to disperse them from time to time, as He did these, into Babylon and the countries around them.

Ezekiel 20:24 "Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols."

The sins, from the beginning, were the same as they were in Ezekiel's time.

They were a rebellious house from the beginning.

They did not have respect for God, or His Sabbaths.

The worst thing of all was their worship of idols.

The very first Commandment forbids the worship of false gods.

Ezekiel 20:25-26 "Wherefore I gave them also statutes [that were] not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;" "And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through [the fire] all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I [am] the LORD."

God allowed the Jews to live in sin.

Like all human beings, the story of the Jews is one long history of rebellion.

Ezekiel believed the law of God to be holy and just, as it really was.

Perhaps this is saying, because of their idolatry, they could not live under God's law.

They had broken covenant with God, when they went to false gods.

The penalty for this is death.

Ezekiel Chapter 20 Questions

1. When was this prophecy given?
2. Who had inquired of God in front of Ezekiel?
3. What were they wanting to know?
4. Who did God promptly answer?
5. What does God call Ezekiel in verse 3?
6. Why is God angry with the elders?
7. Who is to judge the elders?
8. What is Ezekiel to remember in his judgment?
9. The effectual fervent prayer of a _____ man availeth much.
10. How far back does this Word of God go?
11. How had God brought them out of Egypt?
12. What kind of land was the Promised Land?
13. How were they to be different from the rest of the world?
14. The worship of idols brings a _____.
15. What terrible false god did they make, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the 10 commandments?
16. What was the purpose of the 10 plagues on Egypt?
17. Even the _____ believed Almighty God is God, after the ten plagues.
18. What were many nations aware of on their journey to the Promised Land?
19. Why did God extend the time of the wilderness wanderings.
20. What one miracle, in the wilderness, should have shown them of His special care for them?
21. What, besides the 10 commandments, are covered in the statutes and judgments of verse 11?
22. What was the Sabbath a witness of, to the rest of the world?
23. They thought of the sacrifices as an _____, and did not do them for love of God.

24. What was one of the reasons Moses gave to God for not destroying them?
25. Why had God delayed their entering the Promised Land?
26. What did God tell their children in the wilderness?
27. What is the best reason for keeping God's ordinances?
28. Why had God refused to accept their offerings and sacrifices that we read of in Jeremiah?
29. Why did God not destroy them in the wilderness?
30. What was the worst sin they committed?
31. What is the penalty for breaking covenant with God?
32. What had they caused their children to do in the worship of the false god Molech?