

**Ezek. 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.

**Ezek. 20:2** Then came the word of the LORD unto me, saying,

**Ezek. 20:3** 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.

About two years have gone by since Ezekiel first began receiving communication from the Lord and about a year since his last recorded communication. Again the elders of the community of captives have come to Ezekiel to seek a word from the Lord. I think it is interesting that although the Lord has no intention of responding to those who have yet to repent and turn to Him in faith, He is quick to acknowledge His awareness of their action and desire through His servant Ezekiel. I used that specific wording, because scripture is clear that God will never refuse the one who turns to Him in repentance and faith. That truth was emphasized in chapter 18 as well as other places in scripture.

**Prov. 8:17** I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

**Jer. 29:13** And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

**1John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The fact that God, who knows men's hearts, is responding in this way tells me that these elders aren't repentant; they are coming to Ezekiel in the same spirit as they would seek any other "wise man." It's amazing that man always wants the benefits of a relationship with God while still denying Him as Lord in his life. At the outset, the Lord declares that He will not be bothered by those who are living in rebellion and disobedience to Him.

**Ezek. 20:4** Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge *them*? cause them to know the abominations of their fathers:

**Ezek. 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;

**Ezek. 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:

"judge" = i.e. pronounce sentence (for or against); by implication...condemn, contend, defend, execute (judgment), (be a) judge(-ment), x needs, plead, reason

As I looked over some of the words included for the definition of *judge*, I thought the words *plead* and *reason* stood out. It would seem that the Lord is asking Ezekiel to reason with these people as he reminded them of the wicked lifestyles of their forefathers. It's like He is pleading with His people through Ezekiel to realize how God had extended great grace and mercy in His dealings with the people only to be rejected and have His name disgraced among the nations who knew God as the God of Israel.

There was a specific point in time that God had chosen Israel to occupy a place of privilege among the nations before Him. In fact, they were chosen before they ever were a nation—when they were yet but seed in Abraham and designated to come forth through the seed of Isaac and Jacob. He began to reveal Himself in a very public and mighty way when He proceeded to deliver them from Egypt to give them a land of their own. Through their miraculous deliverance, and His provision for them during the wilderness wanderings, and then His empowerment to conquer the land that He was giving them, He declared Himself as “the Lord your God.”

God specifically chose the prime real estate on planet earth for His people. He describes it as “the glory of all lands.” It was a land *flowing* (flowing freely like water, gush out) with milk and honey. The Hebrew root for *milk* made reference to that which was richest and choicest. “Milk and honey” was a reference to blessings of the comforts of life. This tells me that the soil was rich and produced abundantly. We are given a bit more detail about the land in Deuteronomy.

Deut. 8:7 For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;

Deut. 8:8 A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;

Deut. 8:9 A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any *thing* in it; a land whose stones *are* iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

In reading through these verses again, I realized that verse 8 calls it a land of “oil, olive and honey.” *Oil* was a distinct word from *olive*. I’m not sure that would ever have jumped out at me if I had lived in another time and place. Maybe it means nothing; but just maybe it is a reference to wealth that Israel has yet to discover. The Hebrew and its roots for *oil* is a reference to “grease, richness...to shine, become fat.” It wouldn’t surprise me for Israel to discover oil in addition to her other natural resources—agricultural, the Dead Sea, technological expertise, etc.

**Ezek. 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.**

All God asked in return is that they honor Him as LORD. They were to get rid of anything associated with the worship of the idols of Egypt. The command was very clear as delivered directly from God in His own handwriting on tables of stone to Moses.

Ex. 20:2-7 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou

shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 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.**

God sees all. In spite of their choosing to stay together as a group and accept the leadership of Moses once they left Egypt, their actions were proof that they did not accept God as Lord. In spite of their appearance of cooperation and even apparent religious fervor from time to time, they never really forsook their false gods. The Psalmist phrased it this way:

Psa. 78:36 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.

Psa. 78:37 For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

Their actions provoked strong responses from both God and Moses, and ended up in the generation that left Egypt not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. God's decision to spare the nation was in deference to the honor of His own name before the nations. The first example that comes to my mind is found in Exodus at the time when Moses was with God to receive the tables of the law.

Ex. 32:7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*:

Ex. 32:8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

Ex. 32:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people:

Ex. 32:10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

Ex. 32:11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?

Ex. 32:12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

Ex. 32:13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever.

Ex. 32:14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

The other high profile example was when the spies returned from spying out Canaan and displayed a lack of faith in God's ability to give them victory.

Num. 14:11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

Num. 14:12 I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

Num. 14:13 And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear *it*, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)

Num. 14:14 And they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land: *for* they have heard that thou LORD *art* among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and *that* thy cloud standeth over them, and *that* thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

Num. 14:15 Now *if* thou shalt kill *all* this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

Num. 14:16 Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

Num. 14:17 And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,

Num. 14:18 The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*.

Num. 14:19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

Num. 14:20 And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

"in the midst of the land of Egypt" - I thought I should also note that in looking at ancient maps of Egypt, the desert wanderings took place in the Sinai peninsula, which was recognized as part of Egypt.

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

**Ezek. 20:11 And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them.**

I believe verse 10 is a direct reference to the events described in Numbers 14 above. God was always very clear in His expectations of the people. Through Moses God gave the people a clear set of commands and laws that were to govern their lives. What they didn't seem to understand, and what we continue to struggle with as well, is that these guidelines are for our benefit. God lovingly outlined the parameters for living a prosperous and happy life in fellowship and blessing with Him.

Deut. 6:24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, **for our good always**, that he might preserve us alive, as *it is* at this day.

Deut. 12:28 Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, **that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever**, when thou doest *that which is* good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God.

**Ezek. 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.**

This verse is affirming the truth stated in Exodus 31.

Ex. 31:16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, *for* a perpetual covenant.

Ex. 31:17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

I think it is important to note that the keeping of the Sabbath was established as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, the Jewish people. I do believe the principle of the Sabbath is important for the believer today, but it is not connected to our salvation—a free gift from God. Jesus made clear in His ministry that man had corrupted God’s purpose for the Sabbath. (See the topical study, “A Study on the Sabbath,” for a more detailed presentation of this subject.)

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 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;**

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

This group of verses seems to be driving home the truth stated in previous verses. Verse 13 seems to parallel verse 8 in thought and verse 14 parallels verse 9. The reference point in verse 8 was the rejection of God in deference to idols/false gods; the reference point in verse 13 is direct rebellion against God in light of the commands and laws He had given them. Verses 9 and 14 reiterate the truth that it is only in deference to the honor of His name before the heathen nations that God delivered them in spite of their wicked ways. Verse 15 refers back to verse 10 and the fact that a generation had to wander in the wilderness until the existing adult generation died out as a consequence of their lack of faith in God’s ability to give them victory in taking the land. The Creator had sovereignly chosen to give this prime piece of real estate to the Jewish people, and they had no faith in His authority and power to do so. Their subsequent actions of disobedience and rebellion against the laws and statutes that God had given them were a direct reflection of their unbelief, their lack of faith.

“their heart went after idols” – This is a really sad statement as well as a very difficult statement to understand in light of the miraculous provision and

protection with which God had blessed them. We are no different than they. It would seem that we are naturally (pardon the phrase) “hell bent” to have our own way and be like everyone else in spite of the eternal consequences. We are so focused in on the here and now that we have no concept of the wisp of time that represents our current life in comparison to eternity. We seem to be so eager to accept the lies and deceit of the enemy, another created being, and ignore or reject the truth of our Creator.

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

**Ezek. 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:**

**Ezek. 20:19 I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them;**

**Ezek. 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.**

“keep” = to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to, etc.:

In His mercy and in deference to the honor of His name, God did not destroy the whole nation. He did, however, warn the children of those who had died in the wilderness not to follow in the footsteps of their parents. He again identifies Himself as “the LORD your God,” the self-existent, eternal, supreme God. In other words, there is no other being that is His equal. His warning:

- Walk in my statutes – Live your life in obedience to my commands.
- Keep my judgments – I thought the Hebrew gave good insight as to the Lord’s intent for this instruction. Guard and protect yourself by living according to the laws I have given you. They are for your good.
- Do them – A few words in particular stood out to me as I looked at the Hebrew for *do*—“exercise, be industrious, labor, sacrifice, be a warrior.” I think these words get at the heart of the Lord’s admonition. They needed to put forth great effort in striving to live their lives according to God’s leadership and direction. It would not come naturally. The more effort they put into practicing obedience, the more blessing they would experience as a benefit.

I think this is a truth that needs to be emphasized in the church today. Obedience and blessing are a result of commitment and perseverance in the faith. When we let down our guard even a little, the enemy is quick to jump through the crack in our wall of defense. When we keep our spiritual armor on and stay focused on the battle, we are going to experience victory and blessing.

- Hallow my Sabbaths – The keeping of the Sabbath as God intended it was again for their good. It was a time not only for physical renewal, but for spiritual refueling. A time to connect intimately with God and appreciate

His faithfulness to them. In looking at the Hebrew for *sign*, the word *evidence* jumped out to me. The keeping of the Sabbath as God had intended it was evidence, public proof, that the people were acknowledging God as Lord and that they believed His word. This would result in blessing. The prophet Isaiah worded it this way:

Is. 58:13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words:

Is. 58:14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 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.**

In spite of God's mercy and faithfulness, the children proceeded to walk in the ways of their fathers before them. They, too, rebelled against God and walked in disobedience. In spite of His provocation and anger, the Lord stayed His hand of destruction against them in honor of His name before the heathen nations.

**Ezek. 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;**

**Ezek. 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.**

God had warned the people through Moses that if they did not follow Him in obedience as Lord, He would scatter them among the nations.

Deut. 28:58 If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD....

Deut. 28:64 And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, *even* wood and stone.

Deut. 28:65 And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind....

History proves that God's word is true. What a sad state for the nation to come to from such a miraculous beginning.

**Ezek. 20:25 Wherefore I gave them also statutes *that were* not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;**

**Ezek. 20:26 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.**

This chapter is so filled with the sovereignty of God throughout the history of men. It is an amazing commentary on the power and authority of God to be able to weave His plan into the actions of men, whether godly or ungodly, without infringing on their God-given ability to choose. These verses are stating unequivocally that God is in control.

He allowed His people to be taken captive by other nations and experience the wickedness and suffering associated with living outside of God's protective hedge. The laws established by man are only as effective as the men enforcing them. The laws of men are only as righteous as the men enacting them. The laws of man cannot provide the same benefit and protection as the laws of God. By following the laws of men, they ended up offering their children in sacrifice to impotent, worthless idols. You can't get much lower or desperate than that.

It was an act of a faithful Father to allow His children to experience the fullest consequences of sin and evil in order to get them to the point where they would turn back to Him in faith. What a sad commentary on His people, that it is taking so long for them to learn their lesson. The beautiful truth is that God is omniscient; He knows everything. His timing is perfect and His plan will be fulfilled.

"to the end" - One day, soon I believe, Israel will turn back to God as Lord in faith and acceptance of their Messiah and will live in eternal fellowship and blessing with God.

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 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 savour, and poured out there their drink offerings.**

The Lord was faithful to His promise to bring the people into the Promised Land and gave them great victories over their enemies. In spite of His faithfulness to them, it wasn't long before they were using the high spots in the land to offer sacrifices to false gods and idols. *Blasphemy* is the use of irreverent, abusive language. I think we need to recognize that we blaspheme God any time we give reverence or honor to anything or anyone else that rightly belongs only to God. The Hebrew defines *trespass* as treachery, the violation of allegiance or faith; the root word indicates that it was done covertly, as if they could hide anything from God. These actions were specifically forbidden as recorded in Deuteronomy.

**Deut. 12:1 These *are* the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth.**



Deut. 12:2 Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree:

Deut. 12:3 And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

Deut. 12:4 Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.

Deut. 12:5 But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, *even* unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:

Even when truly sacrificing to God, the people were only to offer their sacrifices to God in the place He identified as acceptable and according to His instructions.

**Ezek. 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.**

All I could find in researching the internet on the word *Bamah* was basically that it referenced a high place for idol worship.

**Ezek. 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?**

**Ezek. 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.**

Now the Lord addresses the sin and wickedness of the generation of people represented by the elders who are coming to enquire of Ezekiel. Evidently, they had continued in the idolatrous and wicked ways of their forefathers.

Considering their disregard for God, could they possibly expect to get guidance from Him now? The Lord says absolutely not.

**Ezek. 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.**

In the first part of this verse the Lord is saying that He is not going to allow His people to end up like the rest of the nations on earth. God is aware that the desire of the people is to blend in with the peoples of other nations and serve the gods they serve. Evidently, they looked upon their chosen position before God as a detriment rather than a blessing. Again, they were more concerned with the present than their eternal future.

**Ezek. 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:**

**Ezek. 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.**

Whether they like it or not, God will accomplish His purpose through the nation of Israel. Even though He will have to employ a harsh hand of judgment, He will gather the people back into their land through wrath and violence. This is

an amazingly accurate description of how the nation of Israel was rebirthed as a result of the carnage and evil of World Wars I & II. The nation has continued to grow through continued persecution and suffering.

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

**Ezek. 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 Hebrew for *wilderness* references a place where cattle are driven. The “wilderness of the people” would be a reference to the other nations among which the Lord dispersed His people. Just as surely as He judged (from the Hebrew for *plead*) the wilderness generation coming out of Egypt, He will also judge this wilderness generation.

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

**Ezek. 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.**

God’s purposes and plan for the nation of Israel will be accomplished—in honor of His name and in keeping with His covenant with Abraham. Just as He purged the wilderness generation coming out of Egypt, the Lord is going to purge the nation of unbelievers and those who reject God as Lord. Only those who “pass under the rod,” are identified as belonging to God’s family through acceptance of Jesus the Messiah, will be allowed to enter Israel in the Messiah’s kingdom. This is the time about which the Apostle Paul wrote, “all Israel will be saved.” (cf Romans 11:26) It is the time of the new covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jer. 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

Jer. 31:32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

Jer. 31:33 But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jer. 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 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.**

**Ezek. 20:41 I will accept you with your sweet savour, 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.**

This is an interesting set of verses that covers a huge stretch of time. The Lord basically tells the people through Ezekiel that if they want to worship idols, then so be it; but don't claim His name in the process. It reminds me of His words to the church at Laodicea where He tells the church that He would rather they be hot (faithful and obedient) or cold (rebellious and disobedient) rather than lukewarm (having no significant impact for good or bad).

Verses 40-41 again reference the times talked about by both Jeremiah and Paul as described in the above verses. At that time the heathen nations will have no doubt that He is the God of Israel as well as God of the whole earth and has been in control all along and always will be.

**Ezek. 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.**

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

This truth was proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah.

Is. 1:25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

Is. 1:26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

Is. 1:27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

Is. 1:28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

Is. 1:29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

An excerpt from my journal on Isaiah 1:29 states,

"I think this verse is saying that when the nation returns to the Lord, they will be ashamed of the leaders they have chosen to rule them and the people/things they have chosen to protect/defend themselves. They put their faith in the weak people/things of the world rather than trusting Almighty God."

I think Ezekiel is adding an emphasis to the evil deeds that resulted from their rebellion and rejection of God as Lord. The truth is that when we see ourselves in the light of truth before Almighty God, every child of God loathes himself for the person he/she was before coming to know Him as well as for the many ways we continue to grieve Him through disobedience and/or unwise choices.

**Ezek. 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.

I like the wording of the CJB for this verse:

“You will know that I am *ADONAI* when I have dealt with you in a manner that preserves my reputation, and not according to your evil ways and corrupt actions, house of Isra'el' says *Adonai ELOHIM*.”

Only God with His unchanging character of righteousness, holiness, love and compassion could be so patient and consistent in His dealings with man in general and Israel in particular. The time is coming when every knee will bow and acknowledge Him as Lord. Again, the words from the prophet Isaiah apply.

Is. 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.

Is. 45:23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

Is. 45:24 Surely, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.

I am so grateful to know that God is responding to me with His grace and mercy and not according to my “wicked ways” and what I deserve. He has sovereignly chosen to give grace to those who will acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior.

Psa. 84:11 For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Psa. 84:12 O LORD of hosts, blessed *is* the man that trusteth in thee.

Eph. 1:3 & 7 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ....In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

**Ezek. 20:45** Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

**Ezek. 20:46** 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;

**Ezek. 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.

It's hard to tell from the wording if this begins a separate message or a continuation of the existing message. *Moreover* is not in the Hebrew. A couple of commentaries make note that this marks the beginning of chapter 21 in the Hebrew Bible. Ezekiel is ministering to the captives taken from Judah, the southern kingdom. It would seem that the wording is directing this part of the message specifically to the people of Judah. They are about to experience judgment of God as indicated by the fire He starts. The judgment will affect the whole kingdom. You don't usually use green trees for kindling, but they are going to be devoured just as surely as the dry trees. That would seem to indicate both young and old. This fire will be impossible to put out. Why? Because it is

directly started and controlled by God Almighty. The whole of the southern kingdom will experience the effects of this judgment, as indicated by its reaching from south to north. In a sense the whole nation of Israel is affected since it basically completes the destruction of the whole nation.

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

This is a statement that all the nations will recognize this judgment of the Jewish people as coming from their God. Whatever He purposes will be accomplished.

The question becomes, “How will the nations recognize God’s hand at work?” Partly because He has decreed it in advance through His prophets—beginning with Moses (as we saw previously in the chapter) and continuing on with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In understanding the culture of the day, it would seem that the people gave great credit to their “gods” for their successes and failures, their blessings and sorrows. In that regard, they would not hesitate to credit the “God of Israel” with their being destroyed and taken into captivity.

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

Ezekiel recognizes that he is speaking in a parable, a story that is meant to be a word picture of truth or moral. He evidently doesn’t have much confidence in the ability of his listeners to pick up on the truth being shared. As I looked ahead to the next chapter, it would seem that the Lord is going to give further explanation of this fire He is going to kindle in the south.