

Ezekiel 20 - A History of Israel's Rebellion; "Cruel Theology?"; Regatherings of Israel; God's Final Restoration of Israel

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Ezekiel 20

(C) Historical causes and reality of coming judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem (Ezek 20:1—24:27)

Ezek 20–23 form the fourth and final series of prophecies within the second section of Ezekiel. In Ezek 20, God reflects on Israel's entire history to show how consistently both the rulers and the people have disobeyed Him. Unfortunately, their present circumstances mirror this pattern. In Ezek 21, God warns His people to brace themselves for the final judgment of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and to expect more exiles to arrive from Judah. In Ezek 22–23, YHWH provides the reasons necessitating this final judgment. As will be

seen, this flow of thought extends into Ezek 24, where God uses a parable and two signs to further illustrate the points made in Ezek 20–23, thus concluding this section.

(a) History of Israel's rebellion (20:1-44)

The chapter begins as God delivers a lengthy response to the elders of Israel, who sought the prophet's counsel. In chastising the elders for presuming themselves worthy of divine guidance, God offers them an extensive history lesson that highlights the centuries-long rebellion that has marked God's people.

(i) Introduction (20:1-3)

(a) Date(20:1a)

(b) Elders' inquiry (20:1-2)

1 Now in the **seventh year**, in the **fifth month**, on the **tenth of the month**, **men from the elders of Israel** came to inquire of the LORD, and they sat before me.

1 Now in the seventh year, in the fifth *month*, on the tenth of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.

1 On the seventh year, on the tenth day of the fifth month, men came from the elders of Israel to seek the LORD. They sat down in front of me.

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.

- "...seventh year" - as in 1:1-3 and 8:1, the year is calculated from Jehoiachin's captivity. Since he was taken captive in 597 BC, the seventh year was 591 BC.

- "...fifth *month*" - Av on the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to July/August

- "...tenth of the month" - pinpoints the date to August 14, 591 BC

— This means that 11 months had passed since the events described in 8:1. This was about 2-1/2 years (30 months) before the third/final siege of Jerusalem would begin, in December/January 589/588 BC.

- "...men from the elders of Israel" - as in 8:1 and 14:1, these men were the leaders of Judah who had already been exiled during the first and second deportations

- "...came to inquire of the LORD" - the background for their inquiry is not specified, but it is likely that it stemmed from Egypt's significant victory in Cush (modern Sudan). On the strength of that victory in 592 BC, the pharaoh contemplated advancing into Judah to reclaim Egyptian sovereignty from the Babylonians.

— At the same time, Zedekiah began toying with an idea that he would later adopt, namely, that he would use this opportunity to rebel against Babylon by joining with the Egyptians.

— Against this backdrop, one of the questions that the elders presented to Ezekiel may have been, "Will Egypt triumph over Babylon as she has over Cush?" Another question could have been, "If Egypt succeeds now, will Zedekiah succeed later?"

(c) God's response (20:2-3)

2 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

2 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

2 "Son of Man," the LORD told me,

2 Then came the word of the LORD unto me, saying,

3 "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: "Do you yourselves come to inquire of Me? As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I certainly will not be inquired of by you."'

3 "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you."'

3 "Tell the elders of Israel, 'This is what the Lord GOD asks, "Did you come to inquire of me? As long as I live, I won't let myself be sought by you," declares the Lord GOD.'

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.

- God's response was a rebuke to these elders...basically God is saying, How dare you come to Me for advice after you have treated Me poorly and ignored Me for years.

— Although we don't know the elder's questions for God, the nature of the questions must have been inappropriate because God put Himself under oath ("As I live") and decreed "I certainly will not be inquired of by you."

(ii) Israel's past rebellion (20:4-32)

(a) Idolatry in Egypt (20:4-9)

4 Will you judge them, will you judge *them*, son of man? **Make known to them the abominations of their fathers;**

4 Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers;

4 "Will you judge them? Son of Man, will you indeed judge them? Teach them about the detestable things that their ancestors did.

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

- "...Make known to them the abominations of their fathers" - the theme of this chapter. Ezekiel was to remind these elders of Israel's long history of rebellion and idolatry.

5 and say to them, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: "**On the day** when **I chose Israel** and **swore** to the descendants of the house of Jacob and **made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt**, when I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God,

5 and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God,

5 Tell them, 'This is what the Lord GOD says, "The day I chose Israel, when I made my commitment to the descendants of Jacob's house, I revealed myself to them in the land of Egypt and I made my promise to them with the words, 'I am the LORD your God.'

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;

- Each section in this chapter on Israel's history has a consistent pattern: God's provision for Israel, the people's rebellion, God's judgment, and the assurance of mercy.

— God's provision for Israel here (v5-7) is in her election. This refers to the positional election of Israel and their understanding of that election. Positionally, the nation was elected with Abraham but experientially Israel did not begin to understand their election until the time of Moses (Cf. Deut 7:6-11).

- "...On the day" - Israel's depravity has been evident since the inception of the nation

- "...I chose Israel" - the basis here is God's sovereign choice (Cf. Ex 6:1-4; Deut 7:6; Jer 33:24; Is 40-46; Gen 15:17-21)

- "...swore" - God bound Himself by this oath

- "...made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt" - God reminded them that not only had He elected them, but He also made Himself known to them (Cf. Ex 3:13-18; 6:2-9)

6 on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into **a land that I had selected for them**, flowing with milk and honey, which is **the glory of all the lands**.

6 on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.

6 That day I promised to bring them out of the land of Egypt to the land that I had explored for them—a land flowing with milk and honey. It's the most beautiful of all lands.

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:

- Two more facets of God's provisions for Israel were their deliverance from bondage/slavery in Egypt, and the promise of their own homeland

- "...a land that I had selected for them" - God personally sought out the ideal land for His people

- "...the glory of all the lands" - not because of its inherent productivity or special beauty, but because of God's special choice

7 And I said to them, 'Throw away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.'

7 I said to them, 'Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.'

7 Then I told them, 'Each of you are to abandon your detestable practices. You are not to defile yourselves with Egypt's idols. I am the LORD your God.'""

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.

- In addition to the blessings/provisions that accompanied God's election of Israel, Israel had an obligation: do not engage in idolatry.

8 But **they rebelled against Me** and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not throw away, each of them, the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they abandon the idols of Egypt. "Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to use up My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

8 But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

8 "But they rebelled against me and weren't willing to obey me. None of them abandoned their detestable practices or their Egyptian idols. So I said, 'I'll pour out my anger on them, extending my fury in the middle of the land of Egypt.'

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.

- "...they rebelled against Me" - despite God's warnings and admonitions, Israel was idolatrous even before they left Egypt (Cf. Lev 17:7; Joshua 24:14; Ezek 23:3)

— In fact, the people even carried their idols with them during the wilderness wanderings (Amos 5:25-27). God considered their persistent idolatry as rebellion, so He poured out His anger on them.

9 But I acted **for the sake of My name**, that it would not be defiled in the sight of the nations among whom they *lived*, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

9 But 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 by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

9 I did this so my reputation might not be tarnished among the nations where they were living, among whom I made myself known in their presence when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

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.

- "...for the sake of My name" - to protect His honor, God refrained from executing the fullest extent of His judgment. He did not want His name to be profaned in the sight of the nations. This same concern is echoed by Moses in Deut 9:28b; Num 14:15-16.

— So God's mercy toward Israel was to protect His name/reputation because if He judged Israel as they deserved (complete annihilation), it would have tarnished His name among the nations (Cf. Ps 106:6-8). The surrounding nations might have concluded that He had only liberated His people from Egyptian bondage to destroy them later.

His Name's Sake

The relationship was not just between God and Israel: it was intended to be a demonstration, a form of visibility, to the nations. He did this only for His name's sake, for His glory among those nations. God was attempting to communicate to all nations that He was a righteous God, therefore He had to judge sin. On the other hand, He wanted to demonstrate His mercy. But that ran the risk of being misunderstood by the nations around them that He was not powerful enough to enforce His own laws.

Moses understood that and used that when he negotiated; he would plead on behalf of His Name's sake (Ex 32:12).

(b) Idolatry in the wilderness (20:10-17)

10 So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

10 So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

10 I brought them out of the land of Egypt to bring them to the wilderness

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

- Now God, through Ezekiel, will describe Israel's rebellion during the wilderness wanderings. It will follow the same pattern of provision, rebellion, judgment, and divine mercy.

- The first provision was that God personally brought them out of Egypt and guided them to the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula (Ex 20:10)

11 I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, which, **if a person follows them, then he will live by them.**

11 I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live.

11 where I gave them my statutes and revealed my ordinances to them, which if a person observes, he'll live by them.

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

- The second provision was the Mosaic Law, with its statutes and ordinances (Cf. Deut 10:12-21)

- "...if a person follows them, then he will live by them" - God reiterated a principle previously emphasized in Ezek 18: obedience to the law brings a long life (Cf. Lev 18:5; Deut 30:15-20).

12 Also **I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them**, so that they might know that I am the LORD **who sanctifies them.**

12 Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

12 Also, I instituted my Sabbath for them as a sign between me and them, so they would know that I am the LORD, who has set them apart."

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.

- "...I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them" - the Sabbath, as the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, was between God and Israel. This was the third provision God gave to Israel.

— The Sabbath commandment is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the NT, thus the Sabbath is not binding over Church Age believers

- "...who sanctifies them" - *mekaddesham*, from the root *kodesh*, meaning "apartness" or "sacredness." A sanctified person is someone who has been set apart for God's purposes.

— The grammatical structure of the phrase "the LORD who sanctifies them" means "GOD their Sanctifier" which forms one of God's compound names: *YHWH Medaddesham*.

Israel Rebels in the Wilderness

13 But the **house of Israel** rebelled against Me in the wilderness. **They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances**, which, *if* a person follows them, then he will live by them; and they greatly profaned My Sabbaths. Then **I resolved to pour out My wrath on them** in the wilderness, to annihilate them.

13 But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them.

13 "But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They didn't live by my statutes. They despised my ordinances, which if a person observes, he'll live by them. They greatly profaned my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my anger on them and bring them to an end in the wilderness.

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.

- "...house of Israel" - it was not just a few individuals, or even a majority of the people, who rebelled against God: it was the entire nation that rebelled against God in the wilderness.

- "...They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances" - the proof of their rebellion lies in the fact that they did not keep their end of the bargain of the Mosaic Covenant (Cf. Num 11-14; 15:32-36; Ps 106:13-27)

- "...I resolved to pour out My wrath on them" - God responded to their rebellion with judgment, in accordance with the Mosaic Law

14 But I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be defiled before the eyes of the nations, before whose eyes I had brought them out.

14 But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out.

14 I did this so my reputation wouldn't be tarnished among the nations in whose presence I had brought them out.

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.

- But God "repented" of His resolve to annihilate them in order to keep/maintain His reputation among the nations (Cf. Num 14:11-19; Deut 1:26-33).

15 Also I swore to 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 the lands,

15 Also I swore to 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,

15 "Moreover, I solemnly swore to them in the wilderness that I wouldn't bring them to the land that I had given them—a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all

lands—

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;

- While God withheld His full wrath of judgment, He still disciplined them. He forbade the generation that came out of Egypt to enter the Promised Land. Instead, the nation wandered until that generation died off, with the exception of those under 20 years old, Joshua, and Caleb (Cf. Num 14:20-35; Deut 1:34-35).

16 because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they also profaned My Sabbaths, because their heart continually followed their idols.

16 because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols.

16 because they kept on rejecting my ordinances. They didn't live life consistent with my statutes, they profaned my Sabbaths, and their hearts followed their idols.

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

- Two specific reasons for God's discipline of that generation: first, they neglected to adhere to God's ordinances, second they profaned His Sabbaths.

— Their real problem, however, was their hearts' devotion to idols. Their deep-rooted idolatry rendered the Mosaic Law irrelevant to them. Their hearts and minds were on the idols rather than on God.

17 Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not bring about their annihilation in the wilderness.

17 Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness.

17 Even then, I looked on them with compassion and didn't completely destroy them in the wilderness.

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

- Reaffirms that God did not unleash the full extent of His judgment on Israel, which His people deserved, but instead showed them mercy and spared them

(c) Idolatry in Canaan (20:18-32)

The preceding passage (v10-17) discussed the rebellion of the generation who came out of Egypt. Verses 18-26 describe the rebellion of the second generation, those who were born during the 40-year wilderness wanderings. They, too, rebelled against God.

18 "Instead, I said to **their children** in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols.

18 "I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols.

18 I told their children in the wilderness, 'You are not to follow the statutes of your ancestors, observe their ordinances, or be defiled by their idols.

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:

- "...their children" - the children of the original Exodus generation; those who were both in the wilderness

- The provision of God then was a negative admonition. God did not want the new generation to repeat the same mistakes as their fathers who came out of Egypt.

— Since the key problem of the Exodus generation was idolatry, God admonished the second generation against defiling themselves with the idols of their ancestors (Cf. Lev 17:7; Joshua 24:14).

19 I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and follow them.

19 I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them.

19 I am the LORD your God. You are to follow my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them.

19 I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them;

20 Sanctify My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, so that you may know that I am the LORD your God.'

20 Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.'

20 You are to make my Sabbaths holy, and you are to let them serve as a sign between you and me, so that you may know that I am the LORD your God.'"

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.

- Three admonitions from God to the second generation:

1. "...walk in My statutes" (v19)
2. "...keep My ordinances" (v19)
3. "...follow them [My ordinances]" (v19)
4. "Sanctify My Sabbaths" (v20)

More of Israel's Rebellion

21 But the children **rebelled against Me**; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to follow My ordinances which, *if* a person follows them, then he will live by them; they profaned My Sabbaths. So I resolved to **pour out My wrath on them**, to use up My anger against them in the wilderness.

21 But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, *if* a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness.

21 "But they rebelled against me. They didn't live according to my statutes, observe my ordinances, or practice them, by which a person will live. They also kept profaning my Sabbaths. So I said that I was going to pour out my anger on them and in my anger I'm going to bring about a complete end to them in the wilderness.

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.

- "...rebelled against Me" - the rebellion is seen in their failure to keep any of the four provisions outlined in v18-20. In fact, they did the exact opposite of what was commanded (Cf. Num 25:1-9; Ps 106:28-33).

- "...pour out My wrath on them" - God resolved to bring divine judgment upon them

22 But **I withdrew My hand** and acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be defiled in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.

22 But I withdrew 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.

22 But I withdrew my decision so my reputation wouldn't be tarnished among the nations before whose eyes I brought them out.

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.

- "...I withdrew My hand" - God's mercy tempered His judgment. As before, His mercy was exercised in order to preserve His reputation among the nations.

— God prevented Himself from executing the full judgment, which would have led to the complete annihilation of the nation.

23 Also **I swore to them** in the wilderness that I would scatter them **among the nations and disperse them among the lands**,

23 Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands,

23 "Furthermore, I solemnly swore in the wilderness to disperse them among the nations and scatter them to other lands

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;

- "...I swore to them" - God bound Himself by an oath to execute this dispersion. The revelation of this dispersion to the second generation in the wilderness is found in Lev 26:33; Deut 28:64; 29:28; 30:1.

- "...among the nations...among the lands" - the emphasis is on the magnitude of this dispersion. This cannot refer to the Assyrian or Babylonian exiles, as those were to individual nations.

— God's people would end up in "nations" and "lands" (countries), meaning all over the world (Cf. Ps 106:26-27)

— The reason is that even after multiple instances of discipline, the Israelites remained entrenched in rebellion

- "...disperse them" - the *Diaspora*; historically, the type of worldwide dispersion described here came about as a consequence of rejecting the "Prophet like unto Moses" (Deut 18:15), the Messiah.

— In 70 AD, the Romans devastated Jerusalem and the temple, and renamed the land "Palestine." From then until 1948, Jewish communities were dispersed across the globe. Today, more Jews live outside of Israel than inside of Israel.

24 because they had not complied with My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers.

24 because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers.

24 because they didn't observe my ordinances. Instead, they rejected my statutes, profaned my Sabbaths, and worshipped their ancestors' idols.

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.

- A repeat of the reason for the divine discipline of dispersion around the world

25 I also gave them **statutes** that were not good, and **ordinances** by which they could not live;

25 I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live;

25 So I gave them statutes that weren't good and ordinances by which they could not live.

25 Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;

- Verses 25-26 continue to describe the divine discipline that God imposed on the second generation. However, these two verses have been labeled God's "cruel theology" because they appear to state that God deliberately gave His people "statutes that were not good" (v25) and "pronounced them unclean because of their gifts" (v26).

— But did God really sabotage His people by giving them laws that were not good, then demand that they follow them? Some early church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, believe He did. He believed that God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel not because the Jews were His chosen people, but because they had abandoned Him. The Law was a punishment for the people's sins.

— At first glance, these verses do appear to give the impression that God imparted "death dealing" laws, including sacrifice of the firstborn (v26) upon Israel in order to "make them desolate." However, this interpretation would go against what Ezekiel says in v11,13, namely that God's Law was a way to life.

— It would also contradict what Paul said of the Mosaic Law in the NT. Paul declared that God's Law was "holy, righteous, and good" (Rom 7:12), and that even sinners "must agree that the Law is good" (Rom 7:16).

- So what did God mean when He said that these "statutes were not good"? The "statutes that were not good" and the "ordinances by which they could not live" don't refer to the Mosaic Law, but rather to the commandments of the pagan religions to which Israel had turned.

— These laws "made all their firstborn pass through the fire", a practice God strongly condemned (Cf. Lev 20:1-5).

— So God did indeed play an active role, but only in the sense that He permitted His people to undergo the consequences of their own choices.

26 and I pronounced them **unclean because of their gifts**, in that they made all their firstborn pass through *the fire* so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD."

26 and I pronounced them **unclean because of their gifts**, in that **they caused all their firstborn to pass through *the fire*** so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD."

26 I made them unclean because of their offerings, so they made all their firstborn to pass through the fire, so that I could make them astonished. Then they'll know that I am the LORD."

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 verse elaborates on the consequences of v25...

- "...unclean because of their gifts" - refers to the self-imposed statutes and ordinances of the previous verse. God allowed His people to go their own way.
- "...they caused all their firstborn to pass through *the fire*" - one consequence of Israel's decision to adopt the practices of the pagan nations was the act of human sacrifice. Causing their firstborn to "pass through the fire" perverted Ex 13:12 and violated Lev 18:21; Deut 18:10.
- "...so that I might make them desolate" - '*ashimmeim*, "to be desolated"; there is no way to interpret this word other than destruction. This was God's purpose for allowing the Israelites to pursue their own ways, so that they eventually would come to know who God truly is.
- God's "giving over" of the people to sin was His judicial act. Because they refused to follow His righteous ways, God would abandon them to the consequences of their actions. Paul expressed a similar judgment by God in Rom 1:24,26,28.

Israel's Rebellion Against God upon Entering the Land

27 "Therefore speak to the house of Israel, son of man, and say to them, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: "Again, in this **your fathers** have blasphemed Me by being disloyal to Me.

27 "Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me.

27 "Therefore, Son of Man, you are to speak to the children of Israel and tell them, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: "Your ancestors also blasphemed me in their treacherous behavior against me.

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.

- Verses 1-26 cover the sins of the first and second generations following the Exodus. In v27-29, God addressed their sin after entering the Promised Land.

- "...your fathers" - the personal pronoun makes it clear that this reference is not to distant ancestors, but to the present generation

- It's as if the trajectory of God's accusations are getting closer and closer to home for these elders Ezekiel is addressing. No longer is He referring to their forefathers; now He is referring to the present generation.

- Just like their ancestors, all the way back to their time in Egypt, the present generation also engaged in various forms of idolatry, provoking God with their sacrifices, sweet savors, and drink offerings to idols.

28 When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every tree thick with branches, and there they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings.

28 When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings.

28 I brought them to the land that I had promised to give them. But whenever they saw any high hill and or any leafy tree, they slaughtered their sacrifices there and presented their offerings that provoked my anger. There they presented their pleasing aromas and poured out their drink offering.

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.

- God tells them, through Ezekiel, that once He brought them into the Land, they had a tendency to climb every high hill in order to worship the gods of the surrounding nations.

29 Then I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day."

29 Then I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day."

29 So I asked them, 'What is the high place to which you're going?' That's why the name of the place has been called Bamah to this day."

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

- Here is a play on words in the Hebrew text: Yahweh asked the people, "Mah ba ('What go')?" and answered "Ba-mah ('Go-what').

— The mocking tone here is lost in the English translation. One possible paraphrase could be, "What's this shrine that you visit?" "It's a 'Visit what.'" The idea of the wordplay is to point out the pointlessness of idolatry.

Israel's Rebellion in Ezekiel's Generation

30 Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: "Will you defile yourselves in the way of your fathers and adulterously pursue their detestable things?

30 Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable

things?

30 "Therefore you are to say to Israel's house, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: "Will you defile yourselves like your ancestors did by acting as a prostitute, consistent with their horrible deeds?"

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?

- As God turned now to the present generation of Israel, He posed several accusatory questions. The anticipated answer to these questions is Yes.

31 And when you offer your gifts, when you make your sons pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. So shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I certainly will not be inquired of by you.

31 When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling 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.

31 When you present your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you continue to defile yourselves with your idols to this day. Should I be inquired of by you, you house of Israel? As I live," declares the LORD, "I certainly won't be inquired of by you."

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.

- In v1-4, the elders of Israel approached Ezekiel seeking guidance from the Lord. God, however, refused to entertain their inquiries citing Israel's extensive history of rebellion through idolatry, which persisted even to Ezekiel's day.

— This verse provides the reasons for God's refusal to respond: the Israelites in Ezekiel's day had been offering their gifts to idols, even sacrificing their children in the fire

— It's almost as if God was offended by the audacity of the Israelites to even consider inquiring of Him after centuries of rebellion, idolatry, and disobedience

32 And whatever comes into your mind certainly will not come about, when you say: 'We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, serving wood and stone.'

32 What comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: 'We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone.'

32 The thing that you're imagining is never going to happen, since you're thinking, "We'll be like the nations, like the clans of other¹⁷ lands who serve gods made from wood and stone."'''

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.

- Israel had fallen into self-deception. None of their plans and ideas would succeed. Israel thought she could be like any other nation and serve wood and stone idols without consequences.

— But Israel's action would not go unpunished. God permitted idolatry in other nations because He didn't have a covenant relationship with them. The covenants He made with Israel demanded divine judgment. Therefore He treated Israel as the spiritual adulteress she had become.

The Diaspora and their Selective Return

After 32 verses addressing Israel's past and present, the focus now shifts to Israel's future (v33-44). This section can be divided into three parts:

- The regathering and purging of Israel (v33-38)
- A warning to the present generation (v39)
- Description of the messianic kingdom (v40-44)

The Regathering of Israel

See **(2) The Re-Establishment of Israel** in [Pre-Tribulational Events](#).

The *Diaspora*: into all the nations (Deut 30:1-11) and regathered in stages (Ezek 36).

Ezek 20:33-38 is a major passage that speaks of a Jewish regathering to their ancient land, which must take place before the Tribulation, in preparation for the purging of the non-elect Israelites called "the rebels" in this passage. Zeph 2:1-2 places the timeframe of this regathering as before the Tribulation.

Israel is going to attain their divine role. What God had wanted them to do was be the mechanism by which He could show Himself strong throughout are going to achieve that destiny (Is 49:17-23; 61:4-6; Cf. Is 61:7-10; Jer 23:1-8).

This passage draws a simile between the Exodus and the future return. At the Exodus, God brought the entire nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt into the Sinai Peninsula. While in the Wilderness of Sinai, God's plan for Israel was to accomplish two things: (1) To give them the Law of Moses; and (2) For them to build the Tabernacle through which much of the Law could then be observed. Afterwards, they were to enter the Promised Land. Due to a series of murmurings and rebellions, God finally entered into judgment with His people at Kadesh Barnea (on the very border of the Promised Land). The judgment condemned the entire generation (from the age of 20 upward) to 40 years of wandering.

After the 40 years in the wilderness a whole new nation, a nation born as free men in the wilderness and not as slaves in Egypt, was able to enter the land under Joshua. According to Ezek 20, a similar thing will occur in the future. God will first regather His scattered people from all over the world. That this gathering is not in faith, but in unbelief, is seen from the fact that it is "with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath

poured out." Verses 33 and 34 repeat this phrase twice. This regathering in unbelief occurs after God pours out His wrath on the people. It is no accident that the birth of the State of Israel was out of the Nazi Holocaust's fires.

Once this gathering has fully taken place, God will enter into judgment with His people: The Tribulation judgments will purge out the rebels. This will leave a whole new regenerated nation, which will be able to enter the messianic land of Israel under King Messiah. This passage clearly speaks of a regathering in unbelief in preparation for judgment.

(iii) Future restoration (20:33-44)

(a) Purging out of the rebels (20:33-38)

33 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I assuredly shall be king over you.

33 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you.

33 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "with my powerful hand and outstretched arm, along with my wrath poured out, I'll reign as king over you.

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:

- "As I live" - emphasizes that God Himself would orchestrate this regathering of His people

- "...with wrath poured out" - the clue that tells us that the first regathering will be in unbelief (Cf. 22:17-22; 36:22-24). If Israel was in belief at this time, judgment would be unnecessary.

- Essentially, God is saying to Israel: I will assert My right over you in spite of your resistance (v32), as a master would in the case of his slave, and I will not let you be wrested from Me, because of My regard to My covenant.

- In the past, during the Exodus, God's mighty hand and outstretched arm were wielded on Israel's behalf (Cf. Ex 6:6; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 9:29), but not His mighty hand and outstretched arm would be turned against the nation (Cf. Jer 21:5).

- "...I assuredly shall be king over you" - the objective of God's judgment was not the complete annihilation of Israel but the establishment of God's kingship over them

- The ultimate goal of this regathering and pouring out of wrath is the reign of the Messiah over them as King

34 I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the **lands** where you are scattered, **with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;**

34 I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;
34 I'll bring you out from the nations and gather you from the lands where you were scattered. With a powerful hand, with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out,
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.

- "...lands" - plural, not just from Babylon but regathered from many nations worldwide; this requires a *global* regathering from many nations, not a localized regathering such as after the Babylonian Captivity

- "...with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out" (here & v33) - the first regathering, in unbelief, occurs both after God pours His wrath (The Holocaust, 6M Jews killed) and before God pours out His wrath (the Great Tribulation - 2 out of every 3 Jews will be killed, Zech 13:8).

— It is no accident that the birth of the present state of Israel was birthed out of the Nazi holocaust during WWII

35 and I will bring you into **the wilderness of the peoples**, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face.

35 and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face.

35 I'll bring you into the wilderness of the nations. I'll judge you right there, face to face.

35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people(s), and there will I plead with you face to face.

- Once the regathering is complete, God will personally enter into judgment with His people in a specific location

- "...the wilderness of the peoples" - the exact location for this judgment must be determined by parallel passages:

- Matt 24:15-16 calls this wilderness "mountains"
- Rev 12:6,14 aligns more closely with Ezek 20, mentioning a specific place in the wilderness "prepared by God".
- Is 33:16 describes this place as the munitions or stronghold of rocks
- Micah 2:12 explicitly calls it Bozrah

— Today, this Hebrew word is better known by its Greek equivalent, Petra. In this wilderness, from a vantage point that overlooks the region where the Jews were when they came out of Egypt and into the Negev, including the area known as the Wilderness of Zin, God will enter into judgment with His people face to face.

36 Just as 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.

36 As 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.

36 Just as I judged your ancestors in the wilderness in the land of Egypt, so I'll judge you," declares the LORD.

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.

- God now likens this future exodus and judgment to the original Exodus when, led by Moses, the entire nation of Israel departed from Egypt into the wilderness. Yet, instead of proceeding into the Promised Land, the people rebelled against Moses, prompting God to pass judgment upon the Exodus generation.

— God gradually removed those involved in this rebellion, thus purging the nation. Forty years later, a new generation entered the land under Joshua's leadership. God declared that a similar process would unfold in the future.

— According to Zech 13:8-9, two-thirds of the Jewish people will perish during this judgment

37 "I will make you pass under the **rod**, and I will bring you into the bond of the **covenant**;

37 "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;

37 "I'll cause you to pass under the rod until I will have brought you into the bond of the covenant.

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

- "...rod" - *shevet*, from Lev 27:32 we learn that anyone passing under the rod is sanctified

- "...covenant" - which covenant? The Land Covenant (Deut 29-30) or the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34)?

— It's likely that "covenant" here refers to the New Covenant since regeneration is involved by the passing under the rod. In addition, God had already mentioned the New Covenant earlier in 16:60-63. However, the possibility that this refers to the Land Covenant cannot be entirely dismissed.

38 and I will purge from you the **rebels** and those who revolt against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they reside, but **they will not enter the land of Israel**. So you will know that I am the LORD.

38 and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.

38 I'll eliminate the rebels among you, along with those who are transgressing against me. I'll bring them out of the land where you've lived, but they won't be able to enter the land of Israel. Then you'll know that I am the LORD."

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 purpose of the judgment...to purge out the unbelieving Jews from the believing Remnant. A full two-thirds of the Jews (rebels) will be killed during this period of time (Cf. Zech 13:8-9).

- "...rebels" - unbelieving Jews; opposite of the believing Remnant

- "...they will not enter the land of Israel" - the fact that some of the regathered Jews will never set foot in the Land indicates that God was referring to those who persist in their rebellion against Him

— Just as the rebels were purged after the Exodus, allowing only a select few from the original generation to enter the land under Joshua's leadership, the rebels of the tribulation period will be purged in the wilderness

Finally, the progression of eschatological events in this prophecy clearly follows a premillennial timetable: the regathering of Israel in unbelief to the land of Israel (v38; Cf. Jer 16:14-21), followed by "the time of Jacob's [Israel's] distress" (v35-37; Cf. Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21), during which the rebels would be purged from the faithful remnant, resulting in Israel's national repentance (v43; Zech 12:10—13:2; Matt 24:30), regathering (v40-42; Cf. Zech 8:7-8; Matt 24:31) and restoration to the land, and worship of the messianic king (v33; Cf. Zech 14:9; Matt 24:31), during the millennial kingdom (v40; Cf. Zech 8:11-23; Matt 19:28). [Randall Price, retired Research Professor of Biblical and Judaic Studies, Liberty University]

(b) Fulfillment of the New Covenant (20:39-44)

39 "As for you, house of Israel," this is what the Lord GOD says: "Go, serve everyone of you his idols; but later you will certainly listen to Me, and My holy name you will no longer defile with your gifts and your idols.

39 "As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD, "Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.

39 And now, you house of Israel, this is what the Lord GOD says, "Go ahead and serve your idols, both now and later, but later you'll listen to me, and you won't profane my sacred name again by your offerings and idols.

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.

- In the middle of addressing Israel's future, God inserted a parenthetical warning to Ezekiel's contemporaries: God essentially told them that right now "you do you" as far as idolatry goes, but then promises them that at some point in the future

Before detailing v40-44, a few introductory points should be made to establish the context:

- After the Tribulation, Jesus will set up His kingdom in Jerusalem. He will rule the world from the throne of David, and no one will be able to oppose Him (Ps 2:6; 110:2; Zech 2:12; 9:10; Rev 2:27; 19:15).
- At that time, Jesus will establish world peace (Is 2:4; Micah 4:3), and Israel will be vindicated in the eyes of the world (Is 19:24; Zeph 3:20; Zech 8:3,8).
- Human life will change insofar as things such as illnesses and evil will be limited (Is 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Rev 20:3-6).
- The nations will join together in worship of the God of Israel (Is 19:23-25; 60:6,14).
- They will come to Jerusalem to pay homage to Jesus and learn from the Jewish people about their God (Is 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2; Zech 8:22-23).
- The nations will be obliged to send emissaries to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16-19).
- The earth will be filled with the glory of God (Is 11:9; Hab 2:14).

The contribution that v40-44 makes to this list is that it provides a preliminary description of Israel as a redeemed nation (Cf. Zech 12:10; Rom 11:25-27).

40 For on **My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,**" declares the Lord GOD, **"there the entire house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land;** there I will accept them and there I will demand your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things.

40 For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things.

40 For on my holy mountain, on Israel's high mountains," declares the Lord GOD, "the whole of Israel's house—all of it—will serve me there in the land. I'll accept them there. And there I'll demand your offerings, the first fruits of your portions of all your sacred things.

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 first fruits of your oblations, with all your holy things.

- After the Tribulation judgment described in v33-38, the messianic kingdom will begin and last 1000 years. Verses 40-44 describe that kingdom and provide an introduction to the larger discussion of this topic in Ezek 40-48.

- "...My holy mountain...the high mountain of Israel" - previously mentioned in 17:23 and further discussed in Ezek 40-48. This mountain will not only be the mountain where Jesus Christ will rule, but will also serve as the location for millennial worship.

— This mountain does not exist today, but will materialize when the geography of Israel undergoes major restructuring in preparation for the millennial kingdom. At that time, a new mountain will arise in Israel, the tallest peak worldwide.

— On its northern end will be the millennial temple and millennial Jerusalem will be on the southern end. On this mountain, all Israel will engage in proper worship of the Messiah.

- "...there the entire house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land" - twice God stated that 'all Israel' will worship the Messiah on His holy mountain

— This stresses that this worship will differ from previous times. Unlike during Ezekiel's time, or even today, where only a remnant of Israel worships God correctly, in the future 'all Israel' will worship Him properly on this mountain.

41 As a soothing aroma **I will accept you** when **I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered**; and I will show Myself to be holy among you in the sight of the nations.

41 As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.

41 "When I will have brought you from among the people and have gathered you from the lands where you were scattered, I'll accept you as a pleasing aroma. I'll reveal my holiness among you, and the entire world will see it.

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 verse describes Israel's (second) regathering, in faith. What a contrast with v33-38...there, Israel was depicted in unbelief but here Israel is viewed as a redeemed nation.

- "...I will accept you" - God will accept His people because they will be regenerated. One-third of all Jews will be saved, and their saved state will make them acceptable to a holy God.

- "...I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered" - the second regathering, in faith. The first regathering (going on since 1948 through today) was in unbelief, in preparation for the Tribulation.
— The second regathering, after the Tribulation, will be in belief, in preparation for the messianic kingdom. This is when all of the remaining unfulfilled OT promises to Israel will be fulfilled by God.

42 And you will **know** that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers.

42 And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers.

42 Then you'll know that I, the LORD, brought you to the land of Israel, to the land that I promised to give to your ancestors.

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.

- The outcome of the second regathering in faith: the Jewish people will finally come to a profound understanding of who God truly is.

- "...know" - *yada*, refers to an intimate and deeply-rooted knowledge; *yada* is also the common Hebrew word for sex between husband and wife

— When Israel is regenerated and the restoration of the nation occurs, they will full comprehend the extent of what God has done on their behalf

43 And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds by which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done.

43 There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done.

43 You'll remember all your practices and evil actions by which you've become defiled. You'll loathe yourselves¹⁸ because of all the evil things you've done.

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.

- In addition to recognizing the nature of God (v42), Israel will come to a full realization of their millennia of sin and rebellion against Him. They will recall how they polluted themselves with idolatry, among all of their other sins, which will lead them to "loathe themselves" with regret.

— This verse describes Israel's repentance once she recognizes her transgressions and forsakes them

44 Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you **in behalf of My name**, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD."

44 Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD."

44 Then you'll know that I am the LORD, when I will have dealt with you for the benefit of my own reputation and not according to your evil attitudes or corrupt practices, you house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.

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.

- "...in behalf of My name" - the basis for God's actions concerning Israel's future restoration, and also the reason for God's preservation of the nation in the past.

— When Israel finally recognizes Jesus as their Messiah and King, they will begin to truly know God and understand that His actions in the past toward them were not solely for their own benefit, but to uphold God's reputation

— Israel's final restoration will not hinge on the nation's evil ways or disobedience. If it did, they could only anticipate annihilation. What ensures their final restoration is God's faithfulness as a covenant-keeper and His commitment to preserving the honor of His name.

The Prophecy of the Sword

The sword in view here is Nebuchadnezzar. In 588 BC he had a campaign to quell the revolts of Tyre, Judah, and Ammon, the three principalities that were revolting against him. He launched a siege which ended in 586 BC with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezek 21 which follows is one of the most important chapters in the Book of Ezekiel as it makes it very explicit that the King of Babylon is going to remove the last king of the Davidic line until Messiah comes.

(b) Reality of coming judgment (Ezek 20:45—24:27)

(i) Parable of the forest fire (20:45-49)

45 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

45 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

45 This message came to me from the LORD:

45 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

- A fresh revelation of God to Ezekiel; this verse begins a new section about the reality of coming judgment (and should start a new chapter in Ezekiel, as it does in Hebrew Bible). Ezekiel's prophecy now moves from Israel's distant future (v40-44) back to the present.

46 "Son of man, set your face toward the **south**, and speak prophetically against the **south** and prophesy against the **forest land of the Negev**,

46 "Son of man, set your face toward Teman, and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev,

46 "Son of Man, turn to the south and oppose it, talking toward the south.

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;

- "...south" - *teman*, means "right" or "right hand"; refers to that which is on the right hand

— Whereas today all directions are based on north, in ancient Israel all directions were based off of east. So when facing east, what lies on the right hand is south.

- "...south" - *darom*, a poetic reference to the south. Since in the northern hemisphere, the sun is typically toward the south, it refers to that direction.

- "...forest land of the Negev" - the "Negev" refers to the desert in southern Israel, but this land is desert, not forest. So the use of "forest" here has a symbolic meaning of a multitude of people.

— So Ezekiel's prophecy was not directed at a forest full of trees in the desert, but rather against the inhabitants of that region

47 and say to the forest of the Negev, 'Hear the word of the LORD: this is what the Lord GOD says: "Behold, I am going to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the **blazing flame** will not go out and the entire surface **from south to north** will be scorched by it.

47 and say to the forest of the Negev, 'Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the blazing flame will not be quenched and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it.

47 Prophecy against the forest of the Negev, 'Listen to this message from the LORD. This is what the Lord GOD says: "Look out! I'm about to ignite a fire and set it against you. It will devour every tree—whether green or dry—that lives in you. This powerful flame will not be extinguishable, and the entire surface from south to north will be scorched by it.

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.

- This "forest" representing the population of southern Judah, is destined to burn. God will personally kindle a fire that would consume both green (living) tree and dry (dead) trees with an unquenchable flame.

- "...blazing flame" - literally a "flaming flame"; indicates that this expression refers to the strongest possible type of fire, a flame with utmost ferocity and the most severe form of fire imaginable

- "...from south to north" - while the fire will begin in the south, it will reach/extend from the south to the north, affecting everything in its path

48 And **all mankind will see** that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it will not go out.'"

48 All flesh will see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.'"

48 Then everyone will see that I, the LORD, have kindled it, because it won't be extinguished.'"

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

- This fire will be universally visible, and everyone will know that God started the fire

- It is significant that it will not be only Israel who will acknowledge God's role in starting the fire, but everyone—all mankind—every living being will be aware of this fire and who started it.

- "...all mankind will see" - places this revelation in the prophetic future. This fiery judgment will be part of the Tribulation, and the fire will not be quenched (put out) until the judgment has completed its course.

Ezekiel's Complaint to God

49 Then I said, "Oh, Lord GOD! **They** are saying of me, 'Is he not *just* speaking in riddles?'"

49 Then I said, "Ah Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not *just* speaking parables?'"

49 Then I said, "O Lord GOD! They're saying about me, 'Isn't he one to propound parables?'"

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

- "...They" - the Jewish exiles whom Ezekiel was prophesying to

- It appears that the exiles who heard Ezekiel were whispering about the prophet, accusing him of "parabing parables" or speaking in riddles. Ezekiel had been accused of this before as it was a common reaction of his audience to his symbolic actions and parabolic teachings.

- However, a shift in their attitude is coming as the exiles stopped mocking the prophet in 24:1. However, for now, Ezekiel's complaint to God goes unheard as God gives Ezekiel yet another parable to share with the exiles in Ezek 21.

