

## Message #23

## Ezekiel 20:1-49

It is clear from this book of Ezekiel that there are times when God does punish His people. But it is also clear that no matter how God has decided to punish His people in this life, it is never at the full amount of what they actually deserve. God is totally righteous and He would have the right to be much tougher on us than He is.

What we have seen in Ezekiel is that when God decides to permit bad things to happen to His people, they deserve it. They cannot blame someone else for their problems or their sin. They cannot pass the buck to someone else.

But the truth is, all through history God has shown Himself to be a gracious and forgiving God if His people will turn from their sin and turn to Him. But here is the problem. **The problem is most people love their sin and refuse to turn from their sin. So the reality of it is, when God allows negative things to happen to people committing sin, they have no one to blame but themselves.** They cannot blame someone else for their sin problem.

When God chastises His own, if His own will face the sin and deal with the sin, God will remove the chastisement and replace it with His grace, mercy, forgiveness and blessings.

The problem with Israel is that she hasn't learned that yet. But I guarantee you, based on this chapter in Ezekiel, one day she will. What we see in this chapter is this:

**ISRAEL HAS BEEN A REBELLIOUS NATION THROUGHOUT ALL HER EXISTENCE AND SHE DESERVES TO BE PUNISHED; BUT EVENTUALLY GOD WILL GRACIOUSLY FORGIVE HER AND TRANSFORM HER BECAUSE HE WILL CAUSE HER TO FACE HER SIN AND TURN TO HIM.**

We learn from **verse 1** that this event occurred in the seventh year of the fifth month. What this means is that this prophecy occurred eleven months after the last prophecy (Ezek. 8:1) and four years before the destruction of the temple. So it had been about a year and God's people were still in exile. Nothing had changed with the people. They had not repented one bit.

On this day, the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to find out what was going on. We are not sure what the elders asked, but we may assume from God's answer that it had something to do with the fact that what was happening to them wasn't right. According to **verses 2-3, God said to Ezekiel, tell those elders I am not listening to them.** God would not answer them not because of their question, but because of their pathetic, sinful condition.

What God told Ezekiel to do was to confront these elders with the abominable practices and lifestyle of their fathers (**v. 4**). These people had been involved in evil and pagan actions that are abominations to God. They had been involved in all kinds of immorality and idolatry.

According to **verse 28** they offered sacrifices on “every high hill” and under “every leafy tree.” These people were pathetic. Instead of turning from their sin, they wanted to talk religion. So what God does is remind these elders of their history. He takes them on a journey to remind them that they have been involved in sin and rebellion for a long time. There are actually six main time periods discussed in these verses.

**REBELLION TIME PERIOD #1** – Israel’s rebellion began in the land of Egypt. **20:5-9**

What we get in these verses is a review of Israel’s sin history while she was in Egypt. God says in **verses 5-6** that I made a decision to choose Israel and make Myself known to her while she was in Egypt. He said to them that I have chosen you and I am going to take you to a land flowing with milk and honey. They were slaves in Egypt and God says I am about to set you free.

God told them to cast away detestable things from their eyes and from their lives (**v. 7**). He said get the idolatrous Egyptian things out and I will bless you.

But look at **verse 8**: they rebelled against God and they refused to listen to the Word of God. That made God so angry that He resolved to pour out His wrath on them. But God decided for the sake of His own name that He would not destroy them. It was not that she didn’t deserve it; but it was by His pure grace (**v. 9**).

**God made His own name known by bringing Israel out of Egypt. He never did that because she deserved it.** She was rebellious before He ever took her out of the land.

**REBELLION TIME PERIOD #2** – Israel’s rebellion continued in the wilderness. **20:10-17**

Well after God took Israel out of Egypt, He took her into the wilderness. He did some wonderful things for her in the wilderness. He gave them His Word; His statutes and ordinances and He told them that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them (**v. 11**). He gave them their own “sign day”; the Sabbath Day was given to Israel, not the church (**v. 12**). It was their own special day. It was a day set aside by God and for God and for Israel.

But, as **verse 13** says, they rejected it. They rejected God’s Word and they profaned His Sabbath Day and God resolved to not only pour out His wrath on them, but annihilate them.

But again **verse 14** says He decided not to for the sake of His own name. He did not want the nations to profane His name by annihilating them. **He was not caring for Israel because she deserved it, but because of His name.**

But as **verse 15** reminds us, her rebellion would cost her. He did decide that He would not take this rebellious group into the Promised Land. Because they continually rejected the Word of God and continually had hearts that were not interested in God but pursued idols, He would not let them go into the land (**v. 16**).

But in amazing grace we read **verse 17**, He spared them. He could have destroyed them, but He spared them. He could have annihilated them and been perfect justified. But He did not do it.

**REBELLION TIME PERIOD #3** – Israel’s rebellion continued after the wilderness. **20:18-26**

To Israel’s next generation, God challenged them to walk according to the Word of God and not like the previous generation (**v. 18-20**). He said I will take you into the land and you walk in My ways. He told them if they did that He would bless them.

But **verse 21** says they didn’t listen to God or His Word, either. They rebelled against it. They were not careful to obey God’s Word and, as a result, God’s anger burned against His own people again.

But again, in pure grace, to preserve His own name, He did not destroy them (**v. 22**). **People need to realize this about God. When God’s people are not faithful to Him, the only reason He does not destroy them is because of His own name.**

He promised that He would scatter them among the nations in various parts of the world (**v. 23**). God gave them His Word and gave them specific instruction as to how to live and they plunged themselves into idolatry (**vs. 24-26**). So God pronounced this nation as unclean.

**REBELLION TIME PERIOD #4** – Israel’s rebellion continued after she was in the Promised Land. **20:27-31**

God brought Israel into her Promised Land and what did she do? She pursued idolatry. She did not pursue the Word and will of God; she pursued “Bamah” (**v. 29**), which refers to false religions on almost every high hill. They pursued immorality and idolatry (**v. 30**). When we read through the book of Judges, everyone was doing that which was right in their own eyes. The entire Promised Land was idolatrous.

**Now God says to His own people, do you actually think I will listen to you (v. 31)? God says do you think I am going to listen to anything you have to say when you aren’t interested in obeying Me? God says no way.** God says I will not direct your minds. I will not lead you or guide you. You want to be like the nations, go ahead because I will have nothing to do with you (**v. 32**). The track record of Israel has been horrible. She has never really cultivated a close relationship with God.

This is one serious section of Scripture. It is possible to be a child of God and never really be right with God. It is possible to be a child of God and never cultivate a close relationship with God. We can be so rebellious, God does not direct us or hear us or have anything to do with us.

Now if the text ended here, it would have been tragic.

Now, having laid out the case for the rebellion of Israel, God would have every right to totally and completely destroy her. **But what God says in verses 32-44 is amazing—God says I will graciously regather Israel when she turns from her evil and I will bring Israel back to her land and bless her.**

**RESTORATION TIME PERIOD** – Israel will be fully restored by God. **20:33-44**

Dr. John Walvoord said that this prophecy is “far-reaching.” It has not yet been fulfilled. He says this prophecy is a prophecy that is connected to the second coming of Jesus Christ (*The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, p. 169). God describes what He will eventually do:

**Action #1** - God, Himself, will eventually be king over Israel. **20:33**

The King who will reign as God in Person is none other than Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

**Action #2** - God will regather Israel from foreign nations. **20:34**

Israel today is scattered all over the world. I just read a statistical breakdown of Israel and she is the most scattered nation in the world. Jews are scattered and live in 137 nations of the world. When Christ returns, He will regather the Jews (Matt. 24:31).

**Action #3** - God will bring Israel into the wilderness and enter into face-to-face judgment.  
**20:35-36**

This judgment will be the judgment of the nation Israel. This specific judgment will determine which Jews have the privilege of entering the blessings of the Kingdom.

**Action #4** - God will bring Israel into a proper covenant relationship with Him. **20:37**

The judgment that is described here is the judgment of the Jews or the sheep, who will be alive when Jesus Christ returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation. Jeremiah 33:13-15 says that the Lord will cause this judgment to occur in the “hill country.” The passing “under the rod” pictures a shepherd holding out his rod and forcing the sheep to pass under it in single file. The shepherd would determine who actually had the privilege of entering the fold and, in this case, entering into a new covenant relationship with Him.

**Action #5** - God will eliminate all rebels and they will not enter the land. **20:38**

There will be many Jews who will not enter the Promised Land with all of its blessings, because of their refusal to believe in Jesus Christ. During the Tribulation, 144,000 Jews will take the message of Christ’s second coming for national Israel to the whole world (Rev. 7:4-8).

**Action #6** - God will ultimately see to it that Israel will not profane His name. **20:39**

This has been the goal since the book of Exodus. National Israel glorifying God's name, and not profaning God's name.

**Action #7** - God will eventually accept Israel's worship on His holy mountain. **20:40**

The entire nation of Israel will be in the land and God will accept their worship and receive their contributions. They will worship God on Mt. Zion, in Jerusalem at the Temple.

**Action #8** - God will regather Israel and prove Himself to be her holy God. **20:41**

**Action #9** - God will cause Israel to know He is her God when He brings her to her land. **20:42**

When Israel is right with God, the entire nation will see it and know it.

**Action #10** - God will cause Israel to remember her sin and she will loathe herself for the evil. **20:43**

**Action #11** - God will cause Israel to know that He has not dealt with her according to her evil ways. **20:44**

**JUDGMENT TIME PERIOD** – Israel's land will be judged before God restores her. **20:45-48**

The final 3 ½ years of the Tribulation will feature an all-out assault on the land of Israel. Teman and the Negev refer to the southern part of the land of Israel (**v. 46**). What is most interesting about **verse 47** is that the southern portion of the land of Israel is described as having "forests" and "green trees." We must assume that when Ezekiel gave this prophecy that was the status. Well if you look at this land today, there are certainly no trees or green vegetation. So we must ask, where did those trees go? God wiped them out, literally.

This land should be land flowing with milk and honey, but it sure isn't now. But there will come a day when it will. God will cause it to happen.

But in the end, as **verse 48** says, all people in the world will stand in awe of what God has done. He will pour out His wrath and He will restore Israel.

But look at **verse 49**, the elders were saying to Ezekiel, he is just speaking in parables. We don't know what he means. What this means is that God's people are so out of step with Him that He, Himself, will have to change everything.

What this chapter teaches us is that it is possible to be the property of God and live in a way that is totally out of fellowship with God. One can truly belong to the Lord and miss out on the great blessings of God.