




Welcome back! Praise the LORD for the rain this week, but we should also remember those who have suffered due to floods and mudslides.

Let's pray.

There are always news stories regarding Israel. I want to read a current story, so that you will see how well known organizations are against Israel and misuse our support and tax dollars. However, we have a lot of material today, so I will save the story until the end of the study, if we have time.

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A vertical graphic on the left side of the slide featuring the word "EZEKIEL" in white capital letters, with a bright, fiery light source at the bottom creating a lens flare effect.

OVERVIEW

Idolatry & the Sword(Ezek 20-21)

- Abominations of the Fathers
- Rebellion in the Wilderness
- Blasphemy in Canaan
- Restoration - an End to Rebellion & Idolatry
- Forest Fire and Sword – Prophecy & Meaning
- Sword for the Great Slaughter
- The Sword of the King of Babylon
- A Sword Against Ammon

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In this lesson we will study chapters 20 and 21 of the book of Ezekiel. These are long chapters, and we have a lot of material to cover.

We will learn about the past and future idolatry of the Jewish people.

We will also see God's use of a sword to proclaim warfare and judgment against Jerusalem, the remainder of the nation of Israel, and against a foreign enemy.

By the way, my current estimate is that we will finish the book of Ezekiel by March 30th. We will see...

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Review

- Ezekiel, a priest, a prophet, and a watchman in Babylon continues to speak forth God's warnings
- Only a few years from the siege of Jerusalem
- The LORD judges everyone for their own sins
- The LORD judges groups in this world and individuals in the next
- Davidic line ends with Jehoiachin – only Jesus is can legitimately sit on the throne of David

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Let's review.

Ezekiel is a priest from Jerusalem who was taken to Babylon now more than 7 years ago in Nebuchadnezzar's second conquest in 598 B.C. Ezekiel is the LORD's prophet and watchman to the exiles in Babylon.

Currently in our study, we are just a few years from Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem, and about 5 year's from Jerusalem's destruction. Zedekiah is still the king in Judah and Jerusalem, but his rebellion to Nebuchadnezzar's rule will soon lead to the siege and destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. This will come in 586 B.C. In Jerusalem Zedekiah is continuing to hear from the prophet Jeremiah the same things that Ezekiel is telling the exiles in Babylon.

The last time we met we heard the LORD take issue with a proverb that the people were using as a means for shirking their own responsibility for their troubles. Instead, they claimed that the LORD is punishing them for the sins of their fathers.

However, the LORD makes it clear that He judges everyone according to their own individual sins. He does not judge the children for the sins of their fathers, and He does not judge the fathers for the sins of their children. In fact, the LORD says that He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone.

We also learned an important principle. God judges nations and corporate entities in this world and individuals in the next. Hence, the righteous may suffer and the unrighteous may be blessed by virtue of the group they are in in this world. But, eternal destiny is based upon individual judgment.

Lastly, we discussed how, with Jehoiachin, the Davidic line of kings was at an end. We also learned that only Jesus could then be the worthy and legitimate heir to the throne of David.

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Abominations of the Fathers

- Approx. 1 year since last dated prophecy in Ezekiel 8:1
- Elders (zaqen) came to Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD
- God refuses to respond to the elders
- Instead, the LORD begins a recounting of Israel's history of idolatry
- Their fathers worshipped the idols of Egypt

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So, let's read chapter 20 of Ezekiel verses 1 – 8. (*Read verses 1-8.*)

According to Ezekiel's statement at the beginning of chapter 20, approximately one year has passed since Ezekiel's last dated prophecy in chapter 8 verse 1. Some commentaries say the date was August 14th, 591 B.C. It was the month of Av, which straddles July and August. This makes an August 14 date seem unlikely to me.

A group of elders comes to Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD. We don't know who these "elders" were, or even if they are the same elders that we read about in chapter 8. The Hebrew word for elder is זָקֵן zaqen (zaw-kane'), which literally means old. It would appear from the context that these were men of authority within the exile community in Babylon. We are not told what they wanted to know from the LORD, but it is significant that they believed that they could receive an answer by speaking to Ezekiel.

However, the LORD refuses to respond to the elders. Then, the LORD asks Ezekiel in verse 4 if Ezekiel is willing to judge, that is to pronounce sentence upon, the elders. Why does God ask this of Ezekiel? Imagine if your friends, who are leaders of your church, came to ask you a question, and instead you have to respond by criticizing them in the name of the LORD for their sins. Do you think that might make you a bit uncomfortable?

How do you think the elders felt being told that the LORD would not hear them? How would you feel, if you prayed to the LORD, and the word came back, I'm not going to listen to you? The Bible does say that there are times when our prayers are not heard. See Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:2, and James 4:3 for more on that topic.

The LORD then begins to relate His perspective of the idolatrous history of Israel. First, the LORD says that He chose Israel, and that He confirmed it with an oath. Actually, the LORD made multiple promises to the patriarchs and to kings and prophets. In addition to many promises that the LORD made to Abraham, the LORD made an unconditional covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21. The LORD confirmed that covenant to Isaac and to Jacob. The point I am making here is that the LORD is doing the choosing, not the people.

This is also true of us in Christ. We were chosen before the foundation of the earth as it says in Ephesians 1:4.

Verse 7 highlights that that Israel was deep in idol worship of the gods of Egypt, and verse 8 states that the people did not cast away their idolatry as they were told to do. We know this is true because of the golden calf that Aaron made as well as the two golden calves made by Jeroboam the king of the northern tribes of Israel. Calf worship was a holdover from Egypt.

The peoples of that time felt that an image or idol captured some of the essence of that thing. So having an idol meant their god was with them. They believed that an idol was required to speak to gods. However, with the true and living God idolatry prevents communication. Yet, they did not seem to learn that lesson.

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Rebellion in the Wilderness

- The LORD wanted to pour wrath on the Jewish people in Egypt but did not for His name's sake
- Following the law is life, but people can't keep the law (Rom 8:3, Gal 3:21)
- The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people (of the covenant)
- The Fathers rebelled and died in the wilderness
- The Children rebelled, but God did not destroy them in for His name's sake
- The LORD gave them over to judgments in an attempt to bring them to know that He is the LORD

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Let's read chapter 20 of Ezekiel verses 9 – 26. (*Read verses 9-26.*)

It is clear from the extensive use of "I" in these scriptures that God is the agent that acts in all of this chapter. God takes or does not take action as He pleases.

At the end of verse 8, the LORD states that He should have poured out His wrath and anger on the Jewish people in Egypt for not abandoning their idols. But, in verse 9, the LORD says that He brought the Jewish people out of Egypt for His name's sake. This way His name would not be profaned by the surrounding nations, who would say that the LORD was not able to save His people.

Over and over the LORD looks for ways to bless and extend mercy to His people. But, His justice and righteousness demand that He act when the people sin. And the people continue to sin. Even Moses suffered the consequences of his rebellion in that he was not permitted to enter the land.

The LORD says that following His law is life. He says that His Sabbaths are a sign between He and His people. The Sabbaths represent the LORD's covenant.

However, we know from the New Testament that people can't keep the law. Paul provides that proof in Romans. Romans 8:3 and Galatians 3:21 are just two examples. Still, the people knew the LORD's statutes and did not follow them.

The Exodus generation, the fathers, rebelled in the wilderness, and they did not enter the land the 1st time. The LORD caused them to wander in the wilderness until all of that generation died except for Joshua and Caleb.

That generation's children were warned not to walk in the ways of their fathers, but they did anyway and even sacrificed their own children to false gods. This caused the LORD to want to destroy them, but again the LORD spared them for His name's sake, so that the surrounding heathen nations would not pollute the LORD's name. Nevertheless, God swore an oath that He would "scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries" as He had warned in Deut 28:63-68. The Babylonian exiles are proof of His word.

God abandoned them to their own evil ways, so they would learn from their consequences that God is the LORD. Chuck Smith said that we become like the gods we worship. If you worship Baal, you become like Baal. If you worship Jesus Christ, you become like Jesus. (next slide)

Blasphemy in Canaan

- Ezekiel is told to tell the House of Israel that, once in the land, their fathers blasphemed the LORD and committed sins
- The people sacrificed and gave drink offerings to idols placed on high places
- Ezekiel uses contemptuous pun Bamah
- Because of their idolatry, the LORD will not be inquired of by the elders

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Let's read chapter 20 of Ezekiel verses 27 – 32. (*Read verses 27-32.*)

The LORD tells Ezekiel to speak to the House of Israel. Ezekiel is to tell them that their fathers, once they were in the land, blasphemed the LORD. Their fathers were unfaithful to the LORD, even though the LORD was faithful by bringing the people in to the land as He had promised.

The people established groves of idols in high places in many locations. In these groves, they sacrificed and gave drink offering to their idols.

The LORD says, "What is this high place to which you go?" In Hebrew, this phrase uses the word bamah, which means high place. So, these places were called Bamah as a derisive term.

All of these detestable behaviors were abominations to the LORD. And all of these sinful behaviors led to the exile of the very elders sitting before Ezekiel. Hence the LORD says that He will not be inquired of by them. Instead, the LORD says that the things that are in the minds of the elders will not happen. The LORD will not allow them to worship wood and stone idols.

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Restoration - an End to Rebellion & Idolatry

- The LORD looks to the Future
 - 33 to 39: Divine Restoration
 - 40 to 44: Future Blessing
- Many prophecies of restoration in the Bible
- In the beginning Israel will be in unbelief, but later they will believe (see verse 44)
- Verse 44 is the end of Chap 20 in Hebrew text

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Let's read chapter 20 of Ezekiel verses 33 – 44. (*Read verses 33-44.*)

Now, the LORD looks forward into the future, and he does this in two sections. First, in verses 33 to 39 there is a divine regathering that is not from Babylon. Second, there is a future blessing for the people and the land.

We have already talked a few times about the LORD scattering His people to many nations. We have also seen a few times where the LORD promised the restoration of Israel. In verse 33 to 39 we have once more a promise to gather and restore the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

Actually, there are many other places in the Bible where the LORD promises the restoration of Israel. In Chuck Missler's commentary, he lists a number of these verses. I will briefly go through some of them and list the others. (*Read from Regathering Scriptures*)

Deut 30:1-10
 Isa 11:11-16
 Isa 49:16-23
 Isa 60:1-22
 Isa 61:4-9
 Jer 23:1-8
 Eze 36:22-31
 Amos 9:11-15
 Zech 10:8-12

Please note that the LORD indicates that Israel will first be regathered in unbelief, and the current nation is quite secular and supports behaviors which are sinful according to the LORD. Later, the nation will turn from these behaviors unto the LORD. This is clearly stated in verse 44.

When the people turn to the LORD, then the blessings described in verses 40 to 44 will take place.

In the Hebrew text, verse 44 is the end of Chapter 20. However, we will extend Chapter 20 by considering the last four verses along with the first seven verses of chapter 21.

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Forest Fire and Sword – Prophecy & Meaning

- Ezekiel told to prophesy via allegory against the forest land in the Negev
- The LORD says He will start a fire that will not be quenched, which will burn every green and dry tree
- The LORD is speaking of Nebuchadnezzar who is campaigning against the revolts in Tyre, Judah, and Ammon
- The LORD foretelling the destruction of those provinces
- Ezekiel is to emotionally show his sorrow

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Let's read chapter 20 of Ezekiel verses 45 – 49 and chapter 21 verses 1 - 7. *(Read verses 45-49 & 1-7.)*

Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the people of a forest fire that will not be quenched. This fire will be in the south in the Negev forest, and all the green and dry trees will be consumed.

Neither Ezekiel nor his audience understood this allegory until the LORD gave the meaning starting in chapter 21. This is why the final verse of chapter 20 rightfully belong to chapter 21.

At that point it became apparent that fire meant war and the south meant Judah. The green and dry trees refer to the righteous and the wicked being killed or exiled.

The LORD's sword is Nebuchadnezzar, who in 588 B.C. was on a campaign to quell the revolts in his provinces of Tyre, Judah, and Ammon. Ultimately, Jerusalem will be destroyed in 586 as part of this campaign.

The LORD tells Ezekiel to groan and to display his great sorrow in order to let the people know the severity of the destruction that is coming.

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Sword for the Great Slaughter

- The Lord says that a sword is sharpened and polished
- The sword is in the hand of the slayers
- The Sword is intended for the LORD's people and all the leaders of Israel
- Once the sword has completed its slaughter, then the LORD's fury will abate

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Let's read chapter 21 of Ezekiel verses 8 – 17. (*Read verses 8-17.*)

There is a poetic format to this section. It is possible that Ezekiel sang or even acted out this prophecy. The solemn language and blunt nature of this message was intended to shock Ezekiel's audience.

This is another attempt to portray the destruction that was coming to Jerusalem and Judah.

The sword in this section is described as though it had a life of its own. This is really a reference to the Babylonian army, as is the slayer reference.

Many of the people will die by the sword, whether they are rich and have private chambers or they are fortified behind gates.

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The Sword of the King of Babylon

- Nebuchadnezzar poised to go either to Judah or to Ammon
- Uses divination to determine which road to take – the LORD directs it to Judah
- Zedekiah's number is up
- This is the end of the kingship for Israel until the Messiah comes "whose right it is" because He will be both king and priest

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Let's read chapter 21 of Ezekiel verses 18 – 27. (*Read verses 18-27.*)

The LORD tells Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar will come to fork in the road. On direction will go to Judah and Jerusalem, and one road will lead to Ammon.

Nebuchadnezzar will use divination to determine which path to take. The text lists the divination methods that Nebuchadnezzar will use. But the LORD will cause the result to point to Judah.

Those in Judah will think this is a false divination, because they knew the king had sworn a solemn oath to Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, why would Nebuchadnezzar attack them? But they will remember their guilt.

The LORD then says that Zedekiah's day has come and that his sin is over. The crown will be removed along with all his robes of state. The kingship will depart from Israel until He comes who has the right, and that is Jesus who is both king and priest.

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A Sword Against Ammon

- Prophecy to the Ammonites
- A slaughter is planned for them
- The false divinations of the Ammonites will not save them
- The LORD will judge them and bring their destruction through the Babylonians
- They will not be remembered

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Let's read chapter 21 of Ezekiel verses 28 – 32. (*Read verses 28-32.*)

This final short prophecy seems to be intended to answer the question, "What about the Ammonites?" This would be the question the exiles would be asking, since Judah was to fall, then what about the enemies of Babylon and Israel?

The Ammonites rejoiced over Jerusalem's destruction and they had been Israel's enemy. This prophecy seems to give a quick foreshadowing of the judgement of the other nations that will be undertaken starting with chapter 25. This is also where we will get more detail of God's judgment of the Ammonites.

The Lord intends to bring the Babylonians to destroy Ammon in their own land. That is they will be conquered and decimated by fire and exile and the sword.

Questions?

(read story if time permits)

Let's pray.