

# EZEKIEL

## Hard to Heart

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### *"No Longer on Seeking Terms"*

20:1-32

The leaders among the exiles in Babylon came to Ezekiel seeking to inquire from the Lord. Problem was, they were no longer on 'seeking terms' with God. In verse three the Lord directed Ezekiel to say, "I will not be inquired of by you."

Let's set the stage historically. It was late summer of 591BC. Egypt was on the move as a military power and had just won a notable campaign in the region of the Sudan. Zedekiah, the appointed governor of Jerusalem, decided to make a move against Babylon by aligning with Egypt.

The leaders who came to Ezekiel probably wanted to seek the Lord to ask if the alliance with Egypt would succeed. It was a presumptuous, proud inquiry in that God had already told them through Jeremiah and Ezekiel to remain submitted to Babylon. God's plan was to discipline the nation for seventy years as subjects of Babylon. They were hoping they could circumvent God's plan by playing politics with Egypt.

The Egyptian-alliance would prove a fatal flaw and lead to Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonian armies around 586BC.

Rather than simply answer their inquiry, the Lord told Ezekiel (v4) to set forth His case against them. His case was built on their history as a nation - a history that was filled with idolatry leading right up to, and continuing with, them.

Ezekiel 20:1 It came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me.

Ezekiel 20:2 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 20:3 "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live," says the Lord God, "I will not be inquired of by you." '

Ezekiel 20:4 Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers.

“Will you judge them,” is a way of saying, “Set forth My case against them.”

Sometimes in presenting the Gospel you need to present a case against a person, a case for their sin and need of a Savior in Jesus Christ. No one wears a parachute on a commercial flight as a precaution! They need convincing that the plane is going down and they will perish without it as a lifesaving device.

God was going to “make known to them the abominations of their fathers” in order to show them they were equally guilty of idolatry and rebellion.

The Word and the world are filled with good examples of bad behavior and its consequences. We should take them to heart.

In verses five through nine the Lord discusses the Jews during their time of slavery in Egypt.

Ezekiel 20:5 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "On the day when I chose Israel and raised My hand in an oath to the descendants of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I raised My hand in an oath to them, saying, 'I am the Lord your God.'

Ezekiel 20:6 On that day I raised My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, 'flowing with milk and honey,' the glory of all lands.

Ezekiel 20:7 Then I said to them, 'Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'

Ezekiel 20:8 But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, 'I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.'

Ezekiel 20:9 But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

These verses provide an insiders view of what the Jews were like in Egypt. We know about the Golden Calf they cast and worshipped after they were freed, while Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Law. But here we learn that they were *already* idolators before God delivered them! Otherwise God would not have said, (v7) “Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before your eyes...” at a time prior to the exodus.

When they worshipped the Golden Calf after being led out, it was nothing new. It was a return to what they had already been doing in Egypt.

When you got saved you were described as having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...” (First Thessalonians 1:9). It assumes you were involved in idolatry of some sort, and you were. Thus there is an ever-present danger that you might return to some idol you were delivered from.

**Keep yourselves from idols!** Don't ever assume you've grown strong enough, mature enough, to handle things that once held you in their grip. Don't ever presume that you won't fall prey to things just because you grew up on a firm foundation.

God said He was going to destroy Israel except that He did not want the surrounding Gentile nations to profane His name. His people were at fault, but He acted in mercy towards them for the sake of nonbelievers.

I sometimes wonder how the church goes on when you factor in its many scandals and failures. But then I remember my own failings and am thankful that God deals mercifully with me. Through all our personal and corporate faltering the Lord loves the lost and goes on being merciful towards us for their sake. He finds a way of mercy to discipline us while upholding His holiness.

The exodus stage of Israel's history is described in verses ten through seventeen.

Ezekiel 20:10 "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:11 And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.'

Ezekiel 20:12 Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.

Ezekiel 20:13 Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them.

Ezekiel 20:14 But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out.

Ezekiel 20:15 So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, 'flowing with milk and honey,' the glory of all lands,

Ezekiel 20:16 because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.

Ezekiel 20:17 Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness.

A couple of observations:

1. God stated, "I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.'" If you could perfectly keep God's Law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, you would need no sacrifice or substitute for your sin. But the Law had no enablement within it and, therefore, no one could perfectly keep it. No one, that is, but Jesus - the perfect, sinless, Son of God who then became our sacrifice and substitute by dying on the Cross.
2. God mentioned the Sabbath at least six times in this section. Note the wording in verse twelve: "I gave **them** [the Israelites] My Sabbaths to be a sign between **them** and **Me**, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies **them**." The weekly Sabbath was and is a special sign between God and Israel, setting them apart from the Gentiles. It was never intended for anyone else, and certainly not for us in the church age. It is often claimed that "God instituted the Sabbath in Eden" because of the connection between the day of rest, the seventh day, and

creation. Although God's rest on the seventh day did foreshadow a future Sabbath law, **there is no biblical record of the Sabbath before the children of Israel left the land of Egypt.** Nowhere in Scripture is there any hint that Sabbath-keeping was practiced from Adam to Moses. The Sabbath is not a universal commandment to be observed by all mankind always. God's intent for giving the Sabbath to Israel was not that they would remember creation, but that they would remember their Egyptian slavery and the Lord's deliverance. That's my interpretation and I'm stickin' to it!

God reiterated that He acted to honor His name among the Gentiles. God is evangelical! It's not an excuse to be lackadaisical, but God sees to it that He is not without a witness to the lost.

Verses eighteen through twenty-six follow that generation which was delivered in the exodus into their wilderness wanderings. Because they refused to go in to the land, for fear of its inhabitants, that whole generation of people twenty-years and older, excepting Joshua and Caleb, were consigned to wander in the wilderness for forty years until all had died.

Ezekiel 20:18 "But I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols.

Ezekiel 20:19 I am the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them;

Ezekiel 20:20 hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.'

Ezekiel 20:21 "Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:22 Nevertheless I withdrew My hand and acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out.

Ezekiel 20:23 Also I raised My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries,

Ezekiel 20:24 because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols.

Ezekiel 20:25 "Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live;

Ezekiel 20:26 and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am the Lord." '

Instead of following God's statutes they turned to those of their "fathers," meaning those of the pagan nations whose idols their fathers had adopted. It resulted in horrible practices, like offering their children as human sacrifices.

God "gave them up" to those things. He let those things play-out, giving them over to them, that they might be judged for their rebellion.

You know, if you are sinning and seem to be getting away with it, it just might be that God is giving you over to it in order that it will be found out so you might be brought to a place of repentance. Be sure your sin - unless repented of - will find you out.

After the wilderness wanderings, once that generation had died, came the conquest of the land of Canaan led by Joshua.

Ezekiel 20:27 "Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "In this too your fathers have blasphemed Me, by being unfaithful to Me.

Ezekiel 20:28 When I brought them into the land concerning which I had raised My hand in an oath to give them, and they saw all the high hills and all the thick trees, there they offered their sacrifices and provoked Me with their offerings. There they also sent up their sweet aroma and poured out their drink offerings.

Ezekiel 20:29 Then I said to them, 'What is this high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day." '

Ezekiel 20:30 Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Are you defiling yourselves in the manner of your fathers, and committing harlotry according to their abominations?

Ezekiel 20:31 For when you offer your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day. So shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live," says the Lord God, "I will not be inquired of by you.

Ezekiel 20:32 What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, 'We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.'

The more things changed, the more they stayed the same. Those who settled the land continued in idolatry.

Notice God said to them, “So shall I be inquired of by you?” It’s the same thing He had said to the contemporary Jews. The point being, they were just like their fathers.

It wasn’t that they were being judged for what their fathers had done. They were doing what their fathers had done - doing it willingly, willfully.

The faithfulness of God shines in this darkness. He declared, “What you have in mind shall never be, when you say, We will be like the Gentiles...” God would overrule and keep His promises to them despite their rebellion but without violating His own holiness.

There ends the historical indictment. God intended they turn to Him from idols. But in each era they had returned to idols from God. The current generation was no different. They might be the worst considering they ought to have learned from their history.

The Jews in exile were in no position to be seeking the Lord. That is, they were in no position to be seeking Him to change **His** mind!

They should be changing **their** minds. They should be repenting of their idolatries.

Whether you were saved later in life, after being an idolator, or whether you’ve been a believer since a young age and never really gotten involved in idolatry, the world is always beckoning to you.

Let’s keep ourselves from idols and in a place where we remain on ‘seeking terms’ with our heavenly Father!