

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 20:1-44

Topic

The Elders of the nation of Judah come to inquire of the LORD.

Title

***“National Inquirers:
Idolatrous Minds Want To Know”***

My mother was convinced I'd be arrested and led away handcuffed to jail.

I was on my way to the movies. She warned me that theaters were cracking down on people smuggling outside snacks instead of buying a \$20 candy bar at the concessions stand.

My mom, you see, got all her news from the *National Enquirer*. After all, “Enquiring Minds Want to Know.”

The 6th century Elders of Judah were **‘National Enquiring.’** The chapter begins, “It came to pass... *that* certain of the elders of Israel came to **inquire** of the LORD, and sat before me.”

That's great!! Wasn't it? No, it wasn't great at all.

In verse three the LORD said, “Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live... I will not be inquired of by you.”

“Inquiring of the LORD” means seeking a divine revelation concerning a particular question.

They didn't need a revelation because they didn't heed what the LORD had revealed.

To paraphrase Maverick & Goose, "*They had a need...The need to heed.*"

I'll organize my comments around two questions: **#1 Looking Back, Have You Heeded The Lord?**, and **#2 Looking Ahead, Will You Heed The Lord?**

#2 Looking Back, Have You Heeded The Lord?
(v1-33)

The LORD enjoys reviewing the history of Israel. There are many such long recitals, like the fifty-three verse recap given by Stephen in the Book of Acts.

In our text, the LORD recounts five periods: the Exodus (v5-9), the wilderness (v10-26), the Promised Land (v27-29), the present (v30-38), and the future Millennial Kingdom (v39-44).

Ezk 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.

Ezk 20:2 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 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." '

We are not told exactly what they inquired about. Most likely they were asking if the plan to ally with Egypt would get them free from Babylon. No it wouldn't; and the LORD had been telling them that for decades through his prophets. No need to inquire; it had been asked & answered.

You may have experienced times when it seems as though God is not telling you what to do, where to go, and what to say. Likely He has already told you.

Let's take the common experience of issues in the workplace. Are you praying for your boss to change? Or your fellow employees? That's great - especially if you are praying for their salvation. Or maybe you are asking the Lord to provide you a transfer out.

Are you thanking God that you are worthy to suffer for Him that you might show grace and thereby glorify the Lord? Are you abiding with joy, producing the fruit of the Spirit, so that they might see Jesus? *Because that is why you are there.* If you are not heeding Him, God likely will seem silent when, in fact, He has spoken volumes to you in the Word.

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

A better translation is, "*Are you willing to warn them?*" The Gospel is both good news and a warning of the consequences of rejecting Christ.

Evangelist Ray Comfort likes to say that no one puts on a parachute unless they know the plane is going to crash. Sinners must be told that they need saving.

Some of you here today need a salvation parachute period.

God pointed out "the abominations of their fathers" to show them that their own abominations were exponentially worse.

Ezk 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.'

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.'

The Jews in the Exodus worshipped the gods of Egypt. The LORD swore 3x that He would deliver them, despite their idolatry. In fact, the nation continued in idolatry until the Babylonian captivity.

The LORD treated them like a work in progress. He was confident in Himself that having begun the work of transforming them He would complete it.

Jesus is our confidence as well; He will finish what He started.

The LORD didn't need to swear an oath 3x. He did it so that we would never entertain doubt that He would, or could, forsake them.

Ezk 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.'

"Fury" & "anger," and grace.

Ezk 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.

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

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

In Ezekiel 39:23 it says, "The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity, because they were unfaithful to Me. So I hid My face from them and handed them over to their enemies, and they all fell by the sword."

Though Israel's rebellion was not the testimony God desired, He used it to reveal His grace to the Gentiles. We should never take sin lightly. Nevertheless, where sin abounds, grace abounds.

Randy Alcorn writes, *"Any concept of grace that makes us feel more comfortable about sinning is not biblical grace. God's grace never encourages us to live in sin; on the contrary, it empowers us to say no to sin and yes to truth."*

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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

Israel began observing the Sabbath only *after* God instituted it during the Exodus. Prior to this, *there is no biblical record of Sabbath observance by anyone.*

Didn't God rest on the seventh day, thereby establishing the Sabbath? He rested, but there is no indication that it was to be a continuous observance. There is *nothing* about Adam and Eve or their children observing it.

Here's the clincher: If the Sabbath was a universal command for mankind, how could the LORD make it "a sign between them" and Himself?

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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,

Ezk 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.

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

Ezk 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.

Ezk 20:19 I *am* the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them;

Ezk 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.'

Ezk 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.

Their fathers adopted the surrounding cultures - their laws but more awful, their gods. God intended His special nation to be separate, in order to reach the Gentiles with grace.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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,

Ezk 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.

The Jewish scattering, called the *diaspora*, began with the Babylonian exile and continues today. More than half of the Jews live outside Israel.

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

Ezk 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." '

God "gave them up," letting Israel suffer the consequences of adopting pagan laws. Romans chapter one shows how a nation deteriorates when it rejects God.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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." '

Ezk 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?

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.'

"It will never be." Is God's interference a type of determinism? Is God forcing the Jews? No.

Geno pointed out that we believe the Bible teaches *Relational Sovereignty*.

Theologian Roger Olson says it "*seeks to harmonize divine sovereignty with human free will, suggesting that God's governance is relational and interactive.*"

Before you inquire of the Lord, take a look back. Are you heeding the revelation that He's already given you? If not, start there.

#2 Looking Ahead, Will You Heed The Lord? (v33-44)

These next verses look ahead to the future one-thousand year Kingdom of God on Earth.

Ezk 20:33 "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you ["Fury" is the future Time of Jacob's Trouble. Two-thirds of the Jews on Earth will be killed; one-third will remain to enter the Kingdom]

Ezk 20:34 I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out.

Ezk 20:35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face [Jesus warned that generation who would experience the time of trouble to flee into the Judean wilderness and hide from the antichrist's armies. Facing extinction, they call out to Jesus]

Ezk 20:36 Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you," says the Lord GOD.

Ezk 20:37 "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant [The rod was a shepherd's tool for inspecting his sheep. The LORD is here talking about the separating of believers from unbelievers at His Second Coming. In Matthew 25 He acts like a shepherd, sending the sheep into their reward - the Kingdom on Earth]

Ezk 20:38 I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I *am* the LORD.

Ezk 20:39 "As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD: "Go, serve every one of you his idols - and hereafter - if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols.

Ezk 20:40 For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel," says the Lord GOD, "there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things.

Ezk 20:41 I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.

Ezk 20:42 Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country *for* which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers.

Ezk 20:43 And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed.

Ezk 20:44 Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel," says the Lord GOD.' "

God will "bring [them] into the bond of the covenant." Since this is a Millennial scene, the covenant referred to is the New Covenant. The New Covenant is first revealed in Jeremiah 31:31-34. One element of it is the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit as He takes up residence within believers, enabling us to obey God to His glory. The New Covenant was always meant for all believers. The Church is experiencing it now, though not fully until Jesus returns.

Verses 40-44 depict a judgment upon individual Jews. It will take place on Earth, in the Millennium.

Church Age believers will appear before Jesus in Heaven *prior to* the Millennium, a review for rewards based on sincere service to the Lord.

What is the only activity mentioned that the LORD, Adam, & Eve did together? "The LORD walked in the Garden," and it is inferred by His calling to them that they walked with Him.

Who observed the Sabbath perfectly while on Earth? Jesus. Matthew records one such Sabbath. Jesus took a walk with His disciples, they ate grain, and Jesus healed a man.

Walking with the Lord in a renewed relationship with Him; learning from Him; serving Him.

That's the Sabbath.