

**EZEKIEL**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Ezekiel chapter 20 as we continue our study through the Word of God. According to Ezekiel 8:1, this message given to Ezekiel here in chapter 20 took place some 8 months later. And we are getting close to the end of this first section of Ezekiel that deals with the sin of Judah and the judgment of God that covered Ezekiel chapter 1 through Ezekiel chapter 24. We are just a few years away from the Babylonians third and final assault upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the captivity of the Jews.

So with that as our background, let's begin reading in Ezekiel chapter 20 beginning in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

**EZEKIEL 20****VERSES 1-3**

1. As we read these verses we may be taken back at the response of God to these elders who came to Ezekiel to hear from the Lord. And the Lord told Ezekiel that He was not going to speak to them. Don't you find that odd? That is not the normal response from God when someone is coming to them to hear from Him.

And keep in mind that things were tough, many were captive in Babylon. So these elders wanted to know what was going on, what God was going to do about the situation that they were in. But God is not going to speak to them in regards to their inquiry.

Why would God respond that way? Listen to what the Lord said to them back in Deuteronomy 17:9-13. We are told, **“And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you. Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil person from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.”**

The problem wasn't that God was silent but they did not like what God was saying and they ignored the Lord. But things are tough, they wanted some good news, they wanted something that would tickle their ears and God was not going to give them anymore because He already told them what was coming!

In Deuteronomy God says if they come for instruction and don't listen, they shall die! Why? Because that rebellion will be caught like an infectious disease and it will bring the nation down. God was trying to protect them from this but they did not listen.

2. I remember several years ago when I was an assistant pastor down in Calvary Chapel of Elk Grove there was a member of the church who came up to me after service with a question he had and I shared with Him what God's Word said. He did not like that so I watched him go from assistant pastor to assistant pastor looking for the answer he wanted and never got. The sad thing is he did what he wanted and in the end he lost because God had already spoken to him through His Word of what he was to do, he just didn't like it so he didn't listen! That is what we see here in this chapter!

3. Now as we are going to see, to find the answer people need to look at the past and see what God has said, look to His Word. And God is going to give them a little history lesson, something they knew but refused to see and apply to their lives.

#### VERSES 4-9

1. Notice what God is doing here. He is commissioning Ezekiel to be a judge in the trial of his people, the Jews. And God is going to lay forth His reasons that this judgment has come upon them as He looks into their history and shows their persistent rebellion against what the Lord has said! He is going to show them their abominations in spite of all that the Lord had done for them.

2. We are going to see in this chapter that as God looks at their history He will start with their deliverance from Egypt, how He brought them into the land of Canaan, to the captivity that they now find themselves in and on into the future, a day of restoration for the nation of Israel, for the Jews!

3. As we read these verses we see all that God has done for His people. How He brought them out of bondage, how He brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. God did all this for them and all He asked of them is to worship Him, obey His Words, don't go after idols or put away the idols they had in Egypt and don't follow the way of the Gentiles.

But they did not listen, they did not obey. We are told in Joshua 24:14-18, **“Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’ So the people answered and said: ‘Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.’”**

Now that sounds great, they wanted to serve the Lord but it was empty lip service. They worshiped the gods of the Gentiles and they forsook the Lord. God obeyed His promise to them but they did not obey their promise to the Lord. And because of that the Gentile nations were kept in the dark because the Jews did not shine for the Lord but blended in with these Gentiles and the gods they worshiped! In fact, they did not want to change, they did not want to listen and their actions are evidence for that!

VERSES 10-26

1. In these verses we see that God has brought them out of Egypt and now they are in the wilderness. And God showed them in the wilderness, as they came out of Egypt, how to live. He gave them a day set aside for them to worship Him. It was the Sabbath day, a day for them to be refreshed in the Lord. Now don't be confused, this was a sign to the Jew, as verse 20 repeats for us. And in Exodus 31:16-17 we read, **“Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ‘It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’”** And the reality is that this Sabbath day rest pointed to Jesus, where we find our rest every day!

2. One of the problems today and many are very harsh on this, is that they try to say that Saturday is the Sabbath day and the church should worship God on Saturday and not on Sunday. I disagree. Paul said in Colossians 2:16-17, **“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”**

You see, these things in the Old Testament pointed to Christ. And if you look at the New Testament you can find 9 of the 10 commandments listed, except for the Sabbath day. Why? Because it is not the day of the week you worship God, it is a matter of the heart. We come together as a body on Sunday, but every day should be unto the Lord! And again, our rest is found in Him and we find that as we worship Him!

3. Now as much as God could have destroyed them for their rebellion against Him, He didn't. He extended mercy to them, but as we have seen it didn't change their actions. So God was going to destroy all the adults 20 years old and up except for Joshua and Caleb. Only these two from that age group would enter into the Promise Land, the others would not because of their rebellion against God. It would be the next generation that would enter the land; the others would die in the wilderness.

And God pleads with this next generation not to follow in the footsteps of their parents but to follow the Lord, walk after His judgments. And they too did not follow the Lord!

4. Next the Lord is going to speak of them entering the Promise Land and what they did there, how they rebelled once again against the Lord. Before we get to that listen to what one writer had to say regarding these verses here in Ezekiel. He wrote,

Although God chose not to destroy Israel, the national rebellion had two serious consequences, each introduced by moreover. First, God swore on oath (lifted up my hand) that he would scatter them to various lands (v 23). The time and manner of that dispersion was not specified. The long periods of oppression during the period of the judges probably were the first step in the fulfillment of this threat. Attacks by neighboring nations during the monarchy period resulted in God's people being deported far and wide (cf. Amos 1:6, 9; Joel 3:1-8). The culmination of this threatened dispersion was the deportation of the northern tribes by the Assyrian kings, and the removal of captives from Judah by Nebuchadnezzar.

The exile was a just punishment because the generation that was brought into Canaan also rejected God's holy law and went after idols (v 24).

Second, God punished Israel's national rebellion by giving them over to the consequences of their own sinful desire. Yahweh punished their sin by means of their sin. . . . As they went ever deeper into the baser forms of idolatry, they brought themselves under . . . judgments of a different sort. The pagan religious code that they adopted as their own did not contribute to health, happiness and well being (life), but rather became a vicious and demanding taskmaster (v 25). Stephen describes this situation when he says, "God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7:42).

God punished his people by permitting them to do what they really wanted to do. All the material gifts that God bestowed upon his people were permitted by him to be defiled in the debasing worship of Baal. Israel rejected God's law of dedicating their firstborn to the Lord (Exod 13:2). They replaced it with the horrible practice of child sacrifice (cf. Ezek 16:21). The ultimate end of such perverse pagan practices was national destruction. Only then would Israel realize that Yahweh is the only God (v 26).

- James E. Smith, An Exegetical Commentary on EZEKIEL, pp. 131-132

Not a pretty picture nor is it intended to be. God is showing them why they are being judged, why they are going into captivity!

### VERSES 27-28

1. Even in the Promise Land they rebelled against God and turned to worthless idols, the god's of the Canaanites! Their offering was to be unto the Lord and not to these idols. Now before we are too harsh on the children of Israel, what about our own lives?

You see, Paul said in II Corinthians 2:15-16, **“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”**

Not only are we a sweet smelling sacrifice to the Lord but the fragrance of Jesus flows from our lives and others notice it. Some will receive that gift of life that is found in Christ and it leads to life while others reject it and we are an aroma of death to them. That is what we should be and the question is, “What do you smell like?”

#### VERSES 29-32

1. Now we have come to Ezekiel’s day and they had not learned their lesson, they have not returned to the Lord. They are offering their children as sacrifices to the god Molech, burning them in the fire. God wanted to bless them, He told them to keep the Sabbath day, to worship Him alone and they refused. And they rejected the love of the truth and they sacrificed their children in the fire!

2. And we are no different; we have not learned the lesson. In Acts 16:31 we are told, **“... ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”** So what do we do? We reject the simplicity of what God has said and we add all kinds of works. People go door-to-door, crawl on the ground, chant, light candles, give money, go to mass, sell magazines or flowers, beat their bodies and-so-on. God’s ways are refreshing but we make things so difficult. We turn from the truth to believe a lie! Do you see how what God was showing His people back then is still applicable to our lives today? I hope so!



VERSES 33-38

1. Even after all that they had done God wants to restore them. They rejected Him when they came out of Egypt, they rejected Him in the wilderness, they rejected Him in the Promise Land and even in Ezekiel's day they are rejecting Him and God says I want to restore you back! That is love! When the discipline was over, God will gather his people. Israel will by no means lose her identity among the nations!

So this is speaking of a future restoration of the nation. He is not done with them. He is going to gather His people to Himself. This goes beyond their return from the Babylonian captivity and I believe it is looking on into the Kingdom Age as the Jews turn to their Messiah, to Jesus for their salvation at the end of the Tribulation Period.

2. And please understand that only those who turn to the Messiah will enter in. You see, the shepherd would let only those sheep that were his to pass under his rod and enter his sheepfold. It is a place of security, rest, comfort, joy, and-so-on. And the True Shepherd is saying to Israel that only those who know Him will enter into His sheepfold. What happens to the rest? Look at verse 39 for we are told.

VERSE 39

1. Notice what the Lord is doing here. He is saying that if you want to reject Him you can, but understand you will be purged out of His Kingdom, you will not enter in. You will be cast into eternity in the Lake of Fire! The day will come when God's holy name no longer will be profaned by idolatrous practices and we see that in the Kingdom Age.

VERSES 40-44

1. God still loves His people and He is going to restore them one day. In fact, we are witnessing the beginning of God doing just that, as the Jews are back in the land. And during the Tribulation Period they will turn to Jesus as their Messiah as I have said. A future restoration!

2. This is interesting. God said that He was not going to speak to them and then He spends 41 verses speaking to them. What is going on? They wanted to discuss the situation and God was saying to them that they don't need more information. All they have to do is look back on their history to see what God said to His people back then, He hasn't changed.

3. Don't we hear the same thing today? "God isn't speaking to me!" What do you mean; He has already spoken to us through His Word. But people are not interested in that, they want more information. That is an amazing statement when you think about it. You see, we have a hard enough time obeying what God has already told us in His Word. Look into the **HISTORY**, for the Word of God is **HIS - STORY!** And understand this; God is never silent when you have a Bible with you!

VERSES 45-48

1. Now these verses seem out of place because of the chapter divisions. In the Hebrew Bible verse 45 becomes verse 1 of Ezekiel chapter 21 and it does seem to flow much better. What is said in these verses is setting the stage for what follows in chapter 21 as we will see in a few minutes.

2. Let's look at these verses. Keep in mind that Ezekiel is in the north, in Babylon, and he sees this raging fire come sweeping across the south, the Negev, where Judah was. And this fiery judgment spoke of the Babylonians coming down upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah and destroying them like a fire would. This is what is ahead for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, just a few years down the road!

#### VERSE 49

1. God spoke very clearly on what they were to do, repent and return to Him. But they rejected that truth that was so clear. And now, when God speaks of judgment they couldn't understand why because they didn't believe they were doing anything wrong!

It is as Proverbs 4:19 says, "**The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.**" Also, in Zephaniah 1:17 we read, "**I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.**"

Who can open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind? Only Jesus can! In John chapter 9, after Jesus healed the blind man and now this man whose eyes have been opened by Jesus is before the religious leaders trying to explain how this happened, said, "**... 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.'** . . . **'Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.'**" John 9:25, 31-33. Jesus came to open the eyes of the blind if only they will receive His healing!

**EZEKIEL 21****VERSES 1-5**

1. We have seen that God's mercy was extended to His people but now that is over and His judgment is coming upon them for their sins and their refusal to repent and get right with Him. God's patience, God's longsuffering was over, thus, His sword of judgment has been taken out of its sheath and He is ready to use it upon this nation for their wickedness. The sword of the Lord will not return unto its sheath until the destructive work assigned to it was complete.

2. Now verse 4 seems a little confusing. We are told that the Lord will "**... cut off both righteous and wicked from you.**" How can that be when we were told in Ezekiel chapter 18 that "**'The soul who sins shall die . . . Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?' says the Lord GOD, 'and not that he should turn from his ways and live?' 'For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord GOD. 'Therefore turn and live!'**" Ezekiel 18:20a, 23, 32.

This problem so perplexed the translators of the Septuagint that they changed "**righteous**" to "***unrighteous***" but you can't do that. I think the idea here is that this was how the people saw themselves, as righteous and not that they were. God saw them as they truly were and thus His judgment came upon them.

We have the same thought today as people see themselves as righteous. In other words, they are righteous in their own eyes. Think about it, who are the righteous? The ones who say they are righteous? In our day they are the ones who are church members but are not saved at all, the ones who go through the ritual, who are religious.

A great many people have the band-aid of religion over the sore of sin and that just won't work. It may cover things for a time but in the end, it will be uncovered! They need to pull that old band-aid off and get that sore lanced before it destroys them. It's a cancerous sore, and you simply do not cure cancer by putting a band-aid over it. Neither do you cure sin by becoming religious. God is cutting that sore by bringing in His sword of judgment upon them!

3. Now what is the purpose of judgment? It is not some irrational rage but God is once again trying to get their attention. He is trying to awaken them out of their spiritual sleep. He wants them to return to Him, to recognize that He is the **LORD!** And now, since they ignored all His warnings, He is going to have to hurt them to heal them!

#### VERSES 6-7

1. Notice what Ezekiel is to do in regards to getting this message of God out to the Jewish people in Babylon. He is told to go around those who are in captivity, the Jews and sigh. You know, "**OHHH . . . ! OHHH . . . !**" And when the people see him acting like this, seeing him so brokenhearted, they will ask him what is wrong and Ezekiel will tell them the news of God's judgment and when they get this news they will be devastated!

They will hear of Jerusalem being destroyed, the Temple demolished, many people killed and the rest taken into captivity and this will break the heart of these Jewish captives, all that they hoped for would be gone! This is the message they will hear in just a few years from those Jews who are being taken to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem!

VERSES 8-13

1. This was no laughing matter even though it seems that some were mocking and making fun of Ezekiel for what he was saying as verse 10 seems to be saying. You see, it was not a time of celebration but of mourning. God's instrument of judgment has been sharpened and polished and will destroy the Southern Kingdom of Judah and all who oppose them, that is the Babylonians, for they were the instrument that God was going to use to pour out His judgment by. And as you read this it is like a soldier preparing himself for battle, and God was preparing the Babylonians for the work He had for them.

And to get their attention the Lord tells Ezekiel to make some noise, slap your thigh, let the people know the destruction that is coming. No longer will there be a King in Judah, the nation will fall to the Babylonians!

VERSES 14-17

1. God is telling Ezekiel to clap his hands, twirl his sword, help the people get the **POINT** of the message! And the point is this, sin brings about sadness, it cuts people up, it will destroy them. The tragedy in all of this is God said it didn't have to come to this. If they would have repented, if they would have returned to the Lord they would have lived; they would not be cut to pieces. But they refused, and God's judgment will be completed!

Make no mistake about it, these lessons are for us as well to learn and apply to our lives. What God said to His people back then He is saying to us. Sin will destroy your life! But, if you turn away from sin, if you return to the Lord God will restore your life, that joy will return. But it is difficult but not impossible for Paul says in Galatians 5:16, **“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”** Who is controlling your life, the Spirit of God or the flesh? Whatever is, it will be manifested in your life!

But please remember that sin will put you in bondage to its desires but the Son, Jesus will set you free. I think we lose sight of that because we think we know better than God and we may even think He is holding some fun from our lives. But in the end we find He was right like Samson did. Sin has a way of binding you, blinding you and it will grind at your life as it did Samson's!

### VERSES 18-23

1. King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were deciding which nation to attack first, the Ammonites or the people of Judah. And so he gathered his men together in Riblah, which is a city north of Damascus, in Syria, and they just couldn't decide on their own.

So they used 3 different methods to figure out what nation they should attack first. We see them cast lots with arrows. We might think of it like drawing straws and whoever gets the shortest straw loses. They would place the name of one of these nations on one arrow and the name of the other on another arrow. And they placed both of these arrows in a quiver, and the one drawn out first would be attacked.

They also consulted their gods or teraphim. What this all entailed we are not completely sure, but it is possible that they were contacting the spirit world for guidance in this situation.

And lastly, they would examine the liver as a form of divination known as hepatoscopy. The soothsayers would examine the shape and markings of the liver of a sacrificed animal to see what they should do.

And as they looked at all 3 of these things they all pointed to one place, Jerusalem! They would attack Jerusalem first!

2. Now as the Jews hear of what the King of Babylon is doing they see it as nothing more than vain divination. They believed that God was on their side and thus, it did not matter what these signs were saying, they would be okay! But God was not on their side, in fact God was bringing this judgment upon them and I believe He directed the signs that pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem first!

The other issue for the Jews in Jerusalem is that they had made an oath with Babylon that they would serve him and now they are attacking them. And yes that oath was made but the Jews broke it when they turned to Egypt for help.



We can read of this in Ezekiel chapter 17 where we are told, **“But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? Will he who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered? . . . Since he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and in fact gave his hand and still did all these things, he shall not escape.’ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘As I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head. I will spread My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me. All his fugitives with all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken.’”** Ezekiel 17:15, 18-21.

You see, because they broke this covenant with Babylon and sided with the Egyptians, the Babylonians were going to come down upon them and destroy them. Keep in mind that the Egyptians would be of no help, they would be defeated by the Babylonians. So the confusion they had about this was unjustified, they should have clearly seen why this was happening to them, their sin had brought the judgment of God upon them and they broke the oath they had made with Babylon.

#### VERSES 24-27

1. As we have seen, God was going to use the Babylonians as His instrument of judgment against the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Their sins are open, they are not hidden, and because of that, because they refuse to repent and change their ways, they are going to be destroyed, and many will be taken away as captives to Babylon.

2. Now historically speaking, this wicked prince was Zedekiah. He was the last King to reign in the Southern Kingdom of Judah before the Babylonians came in and destroyed the city, its walls and the Temple. And as they took the remaining people captive, including Zedekiah, the right to rule in Israel was taken away also.

Israel has been without a King since this time in their history. And they will remain without a King until the One spoken of in the Old Testament comes forth to sit upon the throne of David in Jerusalem. It is His right to sit upon the throne and He will be “the culmination of everything to which the Davidic house and the messianic kingship in Israel always have pointed.” (John B. Taylor, Ezekiel, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, p. 165)

It is as Luke 1:31-33 says, “**And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.**” Amen to that and we long for that day!

#### VERSES 28-32

1. Now God speaks of His judgment being poured out upon the people of Ammon. They were not going to escape either. Ammonite soothsayers were envisioning peace and security for their kingdom. Such divination was false and unreliable. Ultimately Ammon will share the same fate as Jerusalem.

We are told in Amos 1:13-15 of this coming judgment upon them. We read, **“Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory. But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour its palaces, Amid shouting in the day of battle, and a tempest in the day of the whirlwind. Their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together,’ says the LORD.”**

God was going to judge them for their wickedness. The brutality they brought upon the innocent just to increase their borders. And they will not escape, judgment is coming, the sword is drawn! And historically speaking, this prophecy concerning judgment against Ammon was fulfilled approximately five years after the destruction of Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the region.

## **EZEKIEL 22**

### **VERSES 1-5**

1. God is telling Ezekiel to act like a judge or prosecuting attorney and in so doing he is going to declare the facts, the things that the Southern Kingdom of Judah did that brought upon them this judgment of God.

You see, they not only turned from the true and living God and were worshipping false gods, idols, but their actions manifested how far they were from God. Lawlessness, murders, injustices were filling the streets. And it would seem that if God did not step in they would have destroyed themselves. This beautiful city was already destroyed before God ever stepped in with His judgment. In Isaiah 1:21 we read, **“How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers.”**

Any person, people, nation that turns from the true and living God will manifest all kinds of immorality because God has given them over to the desires of their heart, which is evil. We see that in our own nation today where good is called evil and evil is called good.

Could you ever imagine that a nation like ours would stand up to kill children in the womb and put down those who think life is a gift from God? We have become that nation! Could you ever imagine that we can legalize mind-altering drugs and come against those that say this is wrong? We have become that nation! Could you ever imagine that we would try to convict police officers who are trying to protect us and are outraged that someone who just robbed a store was shot to death as he tried to get the police officers gun? We have become that nation! We can go on and on but you get the idea, you turn from God as an individual and as a nation and God will give you over to these things!

2. We also see something else that their sin brought upon them. The nation's around them will mock them and try to destroy them. Even today we see a rise once again of anti-Semitism. There continues to be a mocking of the Jews, with many desiring to destroy them. In fact, the nation of Israel is surrounded on 3 sides by 100 million enemies, with the Mediterranean Sea on the other side!

We have seen with the murder of Jews by Islam in France that the Prime Minister of Israel is calling for Jews in France to return home for their own safety! The Jew's have paid a price for their rebellion against God and they still are paying a high price. They refuse to turn to their Savior Jesus Christ but one day, as a nation, they will receive Him!

3. As we read on we are going to see how far they have fallen away from God, the wickedness that permeated their lives.

### VERSES 6-12

1. Look at the wickedness that had permeated the land, the nation! The leaders were corrupt and it filtered down to the common people. They used their power to destroy people's lives so they could make a profit. They ignored their parents, did not respect them. They oppressed those in need. And the things of God, they defiled them, used them to worship their gods by. They even refused to keep the Sabbath day, a day set aside to worship God, to get refreshed, because they did not know Him anymore!

One of the things that is listed here in verse 9 is **SLANDER** and God says that it is like murder before Him. Why would God include this? Because an assassin will kill your physical body but a slanderer will murder your reputation! It is like the new margarine that they were going to come out with called "Rumor." You know, "The margarine that spreads quickly and easily!" How true that is!

As Christians, we are to bless people not put them down, mock them, slander them. And James chapter 3 hits this very hard. James said that same mouth you use to bless God are you also using it to curse your fellow man? A strong warning to us!

2. They also worshiped these false gods in the groves and many times this worship practices degenerated into sexual orgies. It fed the flesh and the Jews went after these false gods like so many people do today! We have not learned the lesson.

3. And as you get into verses 10-12 you see all the wickedness that permeated their lives. We see sexual sins, covetousness, dishonesty, murder, extortion. And the reason these things were found in them is simple, they had forgotten the Lord and thus, the things of this world were manifested in their lives.

You see, the first four commandments deal with our relationship with God and the next six deal with our relationship with our fellow man. And the point is this. If your relationship with God is not right, the way you treat your fellow man will be off and you won't be able to correct it until you get your relationship with God back on track. That is what we see here, and I can tell you that when I see someone who is a Christian treat someone in a nasty way, I know their relationship with God is not right. That is just the way it is.

Do you think that is an exaggeration? I don't. Listen to what this young man said at the age of 17. "Our heart, reason, history, and the work of Christ convince us that without Him we cannot achieve our goals. That without Him we are doomed by God that only Christ can save us." At the age of 6 this boy was baptized in the Lutheran church, back in 1824. At the age of 16 he was confirmed and then by the age of 17 he wrote these words, "The only way we can be happy is to be in Christ."

Do you know who wrote these words? **KARL MARX!** He became the founder of communism, Marxism and yet, at one time he had a great knowledge of God's Word. What happened? He forgot about God! His studies had taken him away from the Word and as he forgot the Lord, look at the millions of lives that have been destroyed because of that! You see, that is not an exaggeration of what can be manifested in the lives of people that have turned from the Lord, have forgotten Him!

### VERSES 13-16

1. As some read of what God is doing with the children of Israel they may feel that God is being unfair or too strict. But God is going to purge the filth from their lives through this judgment. But think about their lives and the garbage that is in them.

You may have seen news reports of people whose homes are filled with junk, with garbage. They have junk piled up from floor to ceiling in some spots. Many times you will find human waste all over the place and animal waste all over the place. And because all that garbage, all that waste, the smell is so bad that they have to have professionals come in with masks and suits to remove this junk!

When God looks at our lives that is what He sees and He wants to clean that garbage up, remove it from our lives. For Judah, they couldn't keep their hands off the idols, so God sent them to Babylon, the center of idolatry and there they learned their lesson. Where are you at? God is calling you to come to Him and give Him that garbage for He wants to fill you with more of His love, more of His nature.

2. If you want a good picture of what God did with His people and many times what He does with us, then look at the life of George Sweeting. At one time he was the president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. When he was young George was caught by his dad smoking.

Now his dad did not spank him or get mad at him. What his dad did was he took him in their boat and went out on the sea and out at sea he gave him a big old cigar to smoke. And by the time he was done he was so sea sick, so green, he never smoked again!

In a sense that is what God is doing here. And make no mistake about it, God did not give up on His people and God will not give up on you, He loves you too much!

#### VERSES 17-22

1. God is likening Judah to dross, the impurities found in metals after they are heated in the fire. And He is saying to them that He is going to heat up the furnace of His judgment and these people who were so self-reliant, not in need of the Lord, would melt away. They would recognize this judgment came from God because they turned from Him.

#### VERSES 23-29

1. This is how bad things had gotten and because they had become use to these things, it did not bother them, they did not see how far from God they had fallen! The land was polluted with their wickedness and the priests, the ones who were to lead them, were not leading them to God but away from God. They were not sharing with them, warning them of the danger and pointing them to God.



As parents we do that with our children, we warn them. We don't let our kids eat rat poison and say they will find out for themselves if it is good or bad. Nor do we let our children play out in the streets thinking they will find out if this is dangerous or not. No, we warn them of the danger that is out there and show them that which is good.

And in the church today, we see leaders refusing to call out the heresy, the apostasy that is being spread. God rebuked His leaders back then and He is doing the same today.

2. And it was not just the religious leaders that were leading people away from God. We see that the political leaders were not interested in the good of the people. They were looking out for themselves. They were making a profit at the expense of the people. And their actions were also leading the people away from God!

3. So we have the prophets who were speaking lies, telling the people what they wanted to hear instead of what they needed to hear. And yes, they were popular, but in God's eyes they were nothing more than false prophets leading the people down a path of death and destruction. And they will be accountable for their actions or their lack of action.

We have the political leaders looking out for themselves. And as you read these things it should sound familiar because it is what we see in our nation. And thus, the warning is simple. The moral collapse of a nation will lead to its destruction!

4. And make no mistake about it. The result of the religious leaders, political leaders, and the prophets not sharing the truths of God is seen in the actions of the people. They were manifesting the things of the world and not of God. And thus, we see oppression, robbery, mistreatment of people in need, no love for the stranger. This is how bad it was in Judah and that is how bad it is in our nation. God can change it but how? Let's read on and see.

#### VERSES 30-31

1. Their wall of protection was broken down, weakened, and God was looking, searching for a man to fill in that gap, to make that wall sturdy once again, but there was no one. And because of that, judgment came upon them and destroyed them, many being killed and the rest taken captive to Babylon. One writer put it like this. He wrote,

The population was thoroughly corrupt. God could find no moral leader to stand in the breach in the moral wall that protected Judah from judgment (cf. 13:5). Morality is like a wall that shields a people from divine wrath. Where that wall breaks down, judgment enters. Judah needed a national leader of the highest quality to use his influence for good to repair that broken wall. None was available (v 30).

- James E. Smith, An Exegetical Commentary on EZEKIEL, p. 146

2. Let me close with this for us to think about because I think it is easy to point our finger at the Southern Kingdom of Judah and their demise because there was no one to stand in the gap, but what about us today?

Too often we complain about the wickedness of our nation. How corrupt the politicians are. We complain about the immorality that is running rampant and the drug abuse problems, the violence that is out of control. We love watching news shows that all they do is complain about how bad it is!

And yes, I do believe that our walls of protection seem to be broken. But here is the wonderful news. Like back then, God is looking for a man to stand in the gap for this nation so that He will not destroy it.

Folks, God is not speaking to the atheist or the unsaved, He is speaking to us! We need to be those people who make a wall and stand in the gap. Instead of complaining, be praying! Instead of despair, point people to the God of hope! Instead of judgment, bring them to the Savior!

Let me leave you with these words to think about from II Chronicles 7:14. We are told, **“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”** May we be those people!