

When God Refused to Listen To the Leaders of a Nation

Our study is from Ezekiel 20 and it is an amazing chapter. You will discover that the prophet Ezekiel was visited by a select group of leaders of Israel and they had a question for Yahweh. But Yahweh refused to listen to them. He did not want to listen to them. He refused to even hear their words. In this study, you are going to discover why!

Ezekiel 20 is the first chapter in the fourth cycle of prophecies. The series begins with chapter 20 and ends with chapter 24. This series of prophecies spans the years 591 B.C. to 589 B.C. It is three years before the Babylonian invasion of Judah in 588 B.C. Our study is unlike anything we have yet studied. Since Ezekiel 20 is a long chapter, we will not read every verse. But the message will still be very clear.

INTRODUCTION. (v 1-4). Verse 1 tells us,

Now in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me. Ezekiel 20:1 (NASB)

The seventh year refers to the seventh year of King Jehoiachin's exile. The fifth month refers to the month Av in the Hebrew calendar. The month begins sometime in July and ends in August. This means that the date of the prophecy is

July/August in the year 591 B.C. We are also told that "certain" elders of Israel came to inquire of Yahweh, and they sat down in front of Ezekiel. Not all of the elders came to Ezekiel, just some! Verses 2-4 explain why this prophecy was given.

And the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live," declares the

Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you." Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers." Ezekiel 20:2-4 (NASB)



First, we are told that Yahweh commanded the

prophet Ezekiel to tell these elders that He would not listen to them. Then we are told Ezekiel was to judge them by explaining why Yahweh did not want to listen to them. Ezekiel was to explain all of the abominations they had committed. This reminds us of the principle that we have previously found in Scripture. God will not listen to the prayers of the wicked. Psalm 66:18 says,

If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; Psalm 66:18 (NASB)

Proverbs 28:9 states,

*He who turns away his ear from listening to the law,
Even his prayer is an abomination.
Proverbs 28:9 (NASB)*

These two verses teach us that when a person is wicked, they are unacceptable, and God will not hear them.

ABOMINATIONS IN EGYPT (v 5-9). Starting with verse 5, Yahweh begins giving the history of Israel's abominations from the time they were in Egypt. Verse 5-8a says;

“And say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God, on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. I said to them, ‘Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.’ But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.” Ezekiel 20:5-8a (NASB)

Then Yahweh reminded the elders that when He spoke to Moses, He had made a covenant with the nation of Israel that He would be their God. Notice the statement “I am the LORD your God” in verse 5 is a quote from Exodus 6:7. Here is the verse.

“Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” Exodus 6:7 (NASB)

So, Yahweh's history lesson begins with the time they were in Egypt and His promise to Israel. His promise included three things. First, He would be their God. Second, He promised to rescue them out of Egypt. Third, He promised to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

In addition, Yahweh commanded them to, “Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.” The expression “detestable things” refers to their idols. It reveals God's opinion about their idols. They were detestable, and our idols are detestable too! This is one of the few places in the Old Testament that reveals the Israelites were worshiping the Egyptian gods and goddesses while they were slaves in Egypt. Joshua 24:14 and Amos 5:25-27 also refer to the Israelites' worship of Egyptian deities while they were in Egypt. This may be one of the reasons that God brought the ten plagues upon the Egyptians (Exodus 7-12). Not only did the plagues humble Pharaoh, but the Israelites discovered that Yahweh was superior to Egypt's gods and goddesses. So, why should they worship these idols?

The phrase “detestable things of his eyes” in verse 7 may just refer to the fact that they enjoyed looking at their idols. It may also have sexual overtones since sex was included in so many of the worship ceremonies of these idols. The phrase “defile yourselves” refers to every involvement they had with those idols.

Then in verse 8, Yahweh reminded them that they had rebelled by refusing to abandon their idols. So, Yahweh said,

Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. Ezekiel 20:8b-9 (NASB)

That is, Yahweh planned to punish them, but changed His plan for the sake of His name. He did not want His name to be ridiculed. We are going to see Yahweh respond this way two more times in this chapter. It is important to remember that this keeps repeating.

FIRST GENERATION'S ABOMINATIONS (v 10-17). Then in verses 10-17, Yahweh reminded the elders about their wanderings in the wilderness after they exited Egypt. Verses 10-17 describe their wilderness journey which is described primarily in Exodus and Numbers. Notice that verse 10 says the Israel-

ites are in the wilderness. In verses 11-12, He gives them statutes, or ordinances, which include the Ten Commandments, and the Sabbaths. We can read about them in the last part of Exodus, Leviticus, and parts of Numbers and Deuteronomy. At the end of verse 12, we are told the purpose was to “sanctify” them. The Hebrew word for “sanctify” means to “set them apart.” That is, Yahweh wanted to set them apart from the surrounding nations—from their neighbors. He did not want them to become like their culture which did not worship Yahweh. So, we should watch our feelings and desires when we want the things of the world. Remember 1 John 2:14-16.

Therefore, once again Yahweh wanted to punish them. This time He wanted to annihilate them. Here are verses 13-14,

“But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them. But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out.”
Ezekiel 20:13-14 (NASB)

Israel refused to obey in the wilderness. They rejected Yahweh’s ordinances, and greatly profaned His Sabbaths. So, Yahweh considered annihilating them, but then did not do it for His glory.

Verses 15-16 tell us that on a second occasion, Yahweh considered refusing to allow them into the promised land. This seems to refer to their refusal to enter the Promised Land after listening to the twelve spies who had visited the Promised Land. If you remember, after the twelve spies visited the promised land, ten of the spies gave a negative report to the people. As a result, the people said they would not enter the promised land. Therefore, Yahweh was angry with them and considered annihilating them. Then a second time Yahweh did not do that for His glory.

Instead, verse 15 adds that He decided to not allow the adults into the promised land. Numbers 14:28-35 states that anyone who was twenty years and older would die in the wilderness except for the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua.

So, the Israelites wandered for forty years until all of them over twenty years of age had died.

Now why did these people respond this way to Yahweh who had done so much for them? Why were they so unthankful? The last part of verse 16 gives us the answer. It says the Israelites’ root problem was that they did not love Yahweh. The verse says,

“... for their heart continually went after their idols.” Ezekiel 20:16 (NASB)

They loved their own idols. Today, many churches have been polluted by the idols of the world because the hearts of believers love idols. It has affected the design of churches buildings, music, Bible studies, selection of leaders, pastors, the preaching, the giving, the involvement in the church, our service, our devotion to the Lord, and our desire to be holy. Because they did not love Yahweh, they enjoyed their idols more. Read Numbers 14:22. It says they rebelled against Yahweh ten different times and did not listen to His voice. When you read the verse ask yourself, why should Yahweh listen to these elders? Why should He listen to anyone who does the same today? For verse 17 says,

Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness. Ezekiel 20:17 (NASB)

SECOND GENERATION’S ABOMINATIONS (v 18-32). Verses 18-32 now focuses on the children of these adults, and their forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. “Their children” refers to the children who were under twenty years of age. That forty-year journey is described primarily in Numbers 15-36. These children were told to not walk as their fathers had, but verse 21 says they rebelled anyway! Verses 21-22 report that once again Yahweh considered pouring out His wrath upon them, but then He did not do that for the benefit of His own glory. That is the third time He had thought about punishing or destroying them.

Verses 23-24 tell us that this time Yahweh decided to scatter them among the nations because they had rejected His statues,

profaned His Sabbaths, and “their eyes were on the idols of their fathers.” That implies they loved looking at their idols. We do not know if they liked the beauty of the idols or the idea of what they thought they provided. Whatever the reason, they loved their idols more than Yahweh.

We should remember from our last study that Exodus 20:5 warns us that if a child hates Yahweh, then the sins of their fathers will be passed onto them as an act of judgment. That happened to Israel. Just as their fathers did not love Yahweh (v. 16), these children did not love Yahweh either. As a result, they committed the same sins, and reaped the consequences!

YAHWEH DROPPED THE RESTRAINTS AND LET THEM SIN. In addition to Yahweh’s plan to scatter them, He added another punishment. Verses 25-26 describe the punishment,

“I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD.” Ezekiel 20:25-26 (NASB)

When Yahweh said that He gave them statutes that were not good, Yahweh is revealing that this is an act of judgment. The act of judgment was that He gave them over to their sins. Romans 1:21-24 teaches that occurs when men reject God. Verses 21-24 say,

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. Romans 1:21-24 (NASB)

Then Romans 1:26 and 28 echo the same truth. Since they wanted their idols, Yahweh just let them sin. We will see the same principle later in verse 39. Yahweh does this when a person abandons Him. He lets them sin!

So as an act of judgment, Yahweh planned to scatter them among the nations, drop the restraints, and give them over to their sin. The consequences are given to us in verse 26. It says they sacrificed their firstborn sons to their idols by making them walk through the fire. This resulted in a drop in their population.

We need to notice three signs of Yahweh’s judgment on Israel in these verses. Because Israel rejected God, He gave them over to their sin. Second, He allowed them to kill their children, and third, He caused their population to decrease.

Today, our nation and other western nations are experiencing a tremendous increase in violence. We have been sacrificing our children to the god of abortion. I believe it is a sign of God’s judgment on our nation and other nations. We are also experiencing a decline in our population just as Israel did. These are signs of God’s judgment upon a nation that hates God. Another sign is the increase in homosexuality (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

ISRAEL BLASPHEMED BY BEING INCREDIBLY UNFAITHFUL. How did Israel respond? Verse 27 says they responded by being even more unfaithful.

“Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, “Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me.” Ezekiel 20:27 (NASB)

The phrase “acting treacherously” is translated from two Hebrew words. Both Hebrew words have the same basic meaning of “unfaithfulness.” One is a verb and the other is a noun. There is double emphasis upon unfaithfulness. That is Israel was extremely unfaithful. Their unfaithfulness is called blasphemy. This means blasphemy includes more than just words. A broader definition includes behavior. This is the result of an unloving heart. Blasphemy occurs by our words and actions.

Israel responded like teenagers who do not want to obey, and yet, want their parents to give them gifts and privileges. The fifth commandment commands children to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12). The commandment is repeated in Ephesians 6:2-3 with a promise. 1 John 5:3 describes their problem.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. 1
John 5:3 (NASB)

They did not love God. They were like children. Even though Yahweh had done all of these things for them, they did not care about Him. He promised to be their God, to rescue them from slavery in Egypt, and to bring them into the promised land. But they did not care. They wanted their idols. They proved it in verses 28-29 when they worshiped idols, sacrificed their children, offered incense, and drink offerings to their idols at the high places. They were unfaithful. They did not love Yahweh.

In verse 30, we are told they defiled themselves. So, verse 31 explains how we can defile ourselves. We just give gifts to our idols (v. 28). We defile ourselves by killing children on the altar of abortion, which is to satisfy one's personal pleasure and convenience. The last part of verse 30 adds that they played the harlot with their "detestable things" just as their fathers did. This strongly implies they defiled themselves by engaging in sacred sexual activities at the high places with the male and female temple prostitutes.

Therefore, Yahweh said in verses 31b-32,

"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you." What comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: 'We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone.'" Ezekiel 20:31-32 (NASB)

What did He say? He said, "I will not be inquired of by you." He would not listen to them. This is when God refuses to listen to the leaders of a nation. Just abandon Yahweh and love your idols. Yahweh would not permit them to be like the nations surrounding them. Yahweh would not allow them to be like their culture. This was Yahweh's judgment on Israel.

So, they blasphemed Him when they were treacherous or unfaithful to Him (v. 27). They were unfaithful because they loved their idols (v. 16). That motivated them to be like their culture. They defiled themselves by playing the harlot and committing the sins of their idols and that the culture promoted. They were just like their fathers. So, Yahweh refused to listen to the leaders of this nation.

FUTURE RESTORATION AND BLESSING (v 33-38, 40-44). Then in verses 33-35, Yahweh announced that someday He would be the king, gather Israel back together, and put them through judgment, that is, the future tribulation (v 36). After judgment, Yahweh promised to bring them into the covenant and fulfill His promise (v 37). The unrighteous would not be in the millennial kingdom (v 38). That is the meaning of the last part of verse 38.

Skipping to verse 40, it is now obvious that verse 38 was referring to the millennial kingdom. Verses 41-44 are a promise of a blessing. So, verses 33-38, and 40-44 are about Israel's future restoration to a worldwide kingdom which will be ruled by the Messiah as king. It will be a time of blessing. This was offered as Israel's future hope.

INVASION IS NEAR (v 39, 45-49). Now we return to verse 39 which was a warning inserted into the middle of this promise. The warning is,

"As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD, "Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.' Ezekiel 20:39 (NASB)

The warning is that Yahweh had stopped suppressing evil in the nation. They could go and enjoy their idols for now. But later they would realize that they were wrong (see v. 37, Zechariah 12:10-14; Romans 11:25-33). The reason is that they would have new hearts. That will occur in the future.

Then verses 45-49 announced that the generation living in Judah would be invaded by the Babylonian army (v 46). The army would spread like a fire over the land. It is interesting to note that Ezekiel 16:40-43 prophesied Jerusalem and the temple would be burned to the ground. Then the prophet complained to Yahweh that the elders said he was just speaking parables. That is, they did not care! They loved their idols and wanted to be like their culture! That proved there was not a good reason for Yahweh to listen to them.

NOTE. Here is a summary of six different ways that we discovered from this chapter that Yahweh judged Israel. He scattered them (v 23), allowed Israel to kill its children (v 26),

allowed the population to decline (v 26), refused to listen to the leaders (3-4, 31) allowed homosexuality to increase (Romans 1:24, 26, 28), and eventually destroyed it (v 45-49).