

## Ezekiel 20 – Wilderness v. Promised Land Children of Israel

By Holly Effiom

VV1-3

What do we learn is taking place in the first verse?

What does it mean to sit before the prophet?

To what does the "...seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month..." allude?

What is significant about the date and time being given? Eze 1:1; 8:1

Did the elders of Israel just gain their positions when they arrived in Babylon?

Have the elders come to sit before Ezekiel elsewhere in the book? Eze 8:1; 14:1

What did we learn about God's thoughts toward these elders?

How does God respond to these leaders?

**LESSON:** The elders of the children of Israel have sat before Ezekiel, making inquiry of God, on several occasions in our reading of the book, Eze 8:1; 14:1. It was in Eze 14:1 that we learned that God was angry with these "leaders" of Israel, though, the events of chapter 8 do give a hint that He might be a little offended by them.

In chapter 14, God asks if He should even allow these men to make their inquiries, since they continue to put their idols "...the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face..." By chapter 20, there's no longer even *considering* the thought – God refuses to even listen to them. What a terrifying thought, that there is a point at which God will stop *listening* to our prayers!

VV4-7

What is God's question to Ezekiel?

Is the term "judgment" being used synonymously with being made to *know* their abominations? Sort of like Ezekiel 16?

Why would God be angered by these leaders?

What does God want Ezekiel to do?

What does God mean when He says He lifted up His hand? Ex 29:20

When did God "choose" Israel? Gen 12:1-3

In what way did God lift up His hand to make Himself known to the seed of the house of Jacob? Ex 2:24-25

When did God lift up His hand to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey? Ex 3:8, 13-14

When did God instruct the children of Israel to throw away their idols? Ex 20:2-4

Was God asking these people to do something new and foreign to them?

**LESSON:** God is telling the story of His relationship in this section of scripture – from the time that He *chose* Abraham to when He covenanted Himself (lifted up His hand) to the children of Israel, revealing His *True Self* to them; to keeping His promise, and bringing them out from slavery in Egypt, to the promised land – Canaan – flowing with milk and honey. What God required of them was not something *new* or *unheard of*. He had always told Israel, throughout the time of their relationship, to put away the abominations of Egypt, and to not defile themselves with their idols.

The elders of Israel could not claim ignorance, *insulting* God to His very face. God is saying here that they were *well-passed* that line in the sand, around which He had placed bright blinking lights, and blaring

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horns, and included prophet after prophet, warning the children of Israel to change direction, to change their ways. Will God send warning after warning to the final Gentile world power?

VV8-9

What was Israel's response to God's instruction?

Was this the first time that Israel rebelled against their God?

When did God consider destroying Israel in the "...midst of the land of Egypt"? Ex 32:1-10

Whose people were worshipping the golden calf?

Who brought these ill-behaved people out of Egypt, according to V7?

When did God choose not to destroy Israel the first time? Ex 32:11-14

To Whom do these people belong, according to Moses?

Who is actually responsible for bringing these people out of Egypt, according to V11?

What do we learn about Moses in this section of scripture?

Did God receive and *accept* to Moses' arguments against destroying these people, before they even got out of Egypt, as His own?

What do we learn about God in studying these verses in Exodus 32 and these in Ezekiel?

LESSON: I have always found Exodus 32 to be an extremely funny section of scripture, despite the horrific end. It makes me think of the parents of a child who has misbehaved saying, "Look what your son (or daughter) has done!" as if they, the parent, have no relation to that child. And, I just love the way Moses subtly *reminds* God, "This was *Your* idea!" Without saying, "I was minding my own business on the backside of an Egyptian desert, tending my father-in-law's sheep..." 😊 Aaron's explanation of how the golden calf was made is classic... "All I did was throw some bits gold into a furnace, and out popped a golden calf!"

All humor aside, what is under discussion here *is* a matter of life and death, still.

Ezekiel is so wonderful to me, not just because the children of Israel (and by extension, *we*) had the privilege of getting to argue with their God and voice their opinion, even if it's wrong; but most importantly, to me, when we speak what is *good*, *lawful*, and *right*, God Himself receives and accepts it, and makes it a part of Himself. Hallelujah! (Lev 27:28) This would only seem appropriate, if God is the recipient of all the blame, then He should be the recipient of all the praise, too. Amen!

VV10-20

Where next does God consider destroying the children of Israel?

What is the context in which this story in Numbers taking place? Num 13:26-27

Did the land they espied indeed flow with milk and honey?

What was the "problem" with the land to which God was leading them? Num 13:28-30

Who was it that was confident they can take the land and wanted to go immediately?

What was the argument against taking the promised land? Num 13:31-33

How did the differing reports affect to the congregation? Num 14:1-5

What does it mean when Moses and Aaron fall on their faces?

Who else was confident that the children of Israel could take the promised land? Num 14:6-10

What did two confident spies warn the people not to do?

Do you think that this might be the reason Moses and Aaron immediately fell on their faces?

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Did the congregation listen to Joshua and Caleb?

Who suddenly appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation?

Who put a question to Moses? Num 14:11-12

What were the questions asked to Moses?

What does God say He will do to these rebels? Does He plan to send an army against them?

Did God plan to start over with Joshua and Caleb, creating a greater nation from them?

How does Moses respond to God's plan? Had that plan been brought up before? Num 14:13-16; Ex 32:10

What does Moses say the Egyptians will do?

What have the people of the land been saying about the children of Israel?

What will the people of the land say is the reason God destroyed the children of Israel?

Does Moses beg God to destroy the children of Israel and start over with himself? Num 14:17-20

Of what does Moses remind God?

Where did Moses hear the words of V18? Ex 34:6-7

What is God's response to Moses' plea?

Would you say that God received and accepted Moses' words in the wilderness, according to Ezekiel 20:14?

What else did God vow after pardoning the rebellion of the children of Israel in the wilderness?

How long did the children of Israel march around the wilderness because of their sin? Num 14:28-34

Was the sin of the children of Israel in the wilderness *idolatry* or *rebellion* against God?

Does it sound like God would judge the children of the "wilderness" children of Israel according to their parents' sin?

Did God tell them to do something different from what He had directed their forebearers to do?

**LESSON:** "...Which if a man *do*, he shall even *live* in them." God repeats these words three times in this chapter, reminding us that what the children of Israel did, or failed to do, was a matter of *their* life, and *their* death, yet they seemed not to *believe* in God, despite the fulfillment of promises and seeing the many miracles God did in their midst.

This story of the second time God considered destroying the children of Israel in the wilderness is not exactly about *idolatry* but rather *fear*. The spies that were sent to study the promised land, returned to give a false report (the KJV calls it a "slander up on the land"). All, except for Joshua and Caleb, caused the whole congregation to *fear* entering the promised land, despite God keeping His promise to bring them out of slavery in Egypt; despite the *miraculous* ways in which He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt; despite the ways in which He kept them in wilderness, gave them a law, provided their every need, turned them into a nation. The God Who did all of this would lead them to their deaths?

The *fear* of the children of Israel led them to *choose* to believe those who returned with a false report instead of their God and, thereby, *rebel* against their God.

I am reminded of the rebellion at the capitol! The *fear* of the country becoming more *ethnically* diverse led many to cleave to a *lie* that the 2020 US election was stolen from the former president (a *documented* liar), resulting in the *rebellion* that took place on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. History has repeated itself.

At the time, seeing the insurrectionists who took control of the well of the senate or congress gather to pray in that room, sent a cold chill down my spine. We have just read in Ezekiel 17 how God was *offended*

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by Zedekiah, king of Judah (His *chosen* people), breaking his *vow* to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in sending ambassadors to Egypt, seeking help to fight against Babylon; and Ezekiel 18 in which God clarifies that the soul that sins against Him shall die. God, the *author* of the Law of Moses and the commandment to honor one's father and mother, does *not* bless iniquity by *anyone*, even His chosen.

It is important to not lose sight of the significance of what we have just studied. From God's perspective, being fearful is tantamount to *idolatry*, because you do not *believe* in Him. If you do not believe *God*, especially after all the proofs that He's shown, you are putting your faith in *something* or *someone* else.

VV21-26

- Who are the children of the "wilderness" children of Israel, according to Num 14:31?
- Did these ones behave differently from their parents?
- Did God consider destroying the children of the "wilderness" children of Israel also?
- Was Moses there to intercede on their behalf? Why or why not?
- When and where in scripture did God say that He would scatter the "promised land" children of Israel among the nations? Dt 28:63-67
- How was God's approach to the "promised land" children of Israel different from how He dealt with their parents?
- What is meant when God says He "withdrew his hand"?
- What prompted God to withdraw His hand?
- What is meant by "...pass through the fire..."?
- Who was passed through the fire? What would this cause God to do to these "promised land" children of Israel?
- Would you say that this is part of the desolation resulting from their abominations?

LESSON: Deuteronomy 28 is the "blessings and curses" chapter of the Law of Moses. God clearly lays out what will happen if you abide in the law and what will happen if you abandon the law. Reading the curses that would come upon the children of Israel is like hearing their future being spoken, and this was *prior* to their ever entering the promised land. Here in Ezekiel, we see all these curses befalling them, even though God had warned them generations before.

The other thing to note about Deuteronomy 28, God is making it clear that the outcome that befalls them – good or bad – was completely within the control of the people, especially their own leadership. Ultimately, there is no-one to blame for failure, but themselves – God has shown that He is *for* them.

This will also be the case for that final Gentile world power. God will have *more* than shown that He has been for that foolish nation (Dt 32:20-21) – He will have sent His Son, Emmanuel, which means "God with us"!

VV27-32

- What does God say happened as soon as He brought the children of Israel into the land promised?
- What does God ask the children of Israel in their new land? What is their answer?
- Do the "promised land" children of Israel have an excuse? Why or why not?
- What do we learn of their character through this section of scripture?
- Why won't God allow the "promised land" children of Israel to know His mind? What have they done to shut off the blessings of God?

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What does God say these children of Israel have in their minds?

Will God allow it to come to pass?

LESSON: The children of Israel upon entering the promised land, immediately sought out the “high places”, that is, they were *deceitful* in their dealings with God, thinking as soon as they got in their land, they would be just like all the nations around them. They had no intention, *never* had any intention, of faithfulness to their Redeemer.

What a sad commentary on these “chosen” people. They had no concept nor understanding that God was doing a mighty work in them, for them, and through them; they just wanted to be a great nation – like saying, “OK, God, we can take it from here.” This makes me think about something I learned when teaching on Numbers 14 – a study on 3 visions. Numbers 14 is a pivotal chapter, as it is where the children of Israel are condemned to 40 years in the wilderness, until the unbelieving among them died off.

The vision of the children of Israel went no further than the tip of their nose. The Egyptians were a grief to them, and they just wanted to be out from under their boot – so that they can serve God with all their hearts? Surely not. (Num 14:1-4)

Moses saw that God was making the children of Israel into a nation, a *mighty* nation, *if* they continued to have faith, and he could convince God to not kill them all (and this was *after* the second time God suggested wiping them all out and starting over with Moses, Num 14:11-19).

God’s vision, as communicated in Num 14:20-24, is for the whole *earth*. The *unbelief* of the children of Israel (those who *saw* and *experienced* the miracles) kept them from entering into the promise.

Unbelief – thinking *you* know more than *God* – is a killer.

VV33-37 (Hos 2:14-23)

What vow is God making here?

Is God vowing to bring out the children of Israel from among the Egyptians? How do you know this is different?

Will it be a peaceful exit from the nations?

To where will God bring the people? For what purpose?

What does it mean to “pass under the rod”?

What is the goal of having the children of Israel “pass under the rod”?

LESSON: The wilderness experience of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt was to keep the rebels and transgressors among them from entering the promised land. It took 40 years for them to die off. Such will be the case with this second wilderness which began in Ezekiel and continues through the 42 months of Gentile world rule ends.

So, now we know that this section of scripture informs us that the Rev 12:6, 14 wilderness is what is under discussion, not the “wilderness” after the exodus from Egypt.

In this section of scripture, it sounds like God is going to *force* Israel into righteousness and faithfulness to her vow, but the story God tells in Hosea 2:14-23 about *what* will take place in this second wilderness is different from this impression.

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I absolutely love every part of the Bible. Just in this study in Ezekiel, my husband makes me laugh when I tell him that chapter 16 (or whichever chapter we're studying) is a *powerful* section of scripture, saying, "That's what you said about chapter 14 (or whatever prior chapter about which I had said that)!" But my absolute favorite section of scripture to read is Hos 2:14-23, because God allows us to see His heart... His *desire* toward Israel, and by extension, the whole world.

1. God's approach to dealing with His adulterous wife is to remove her from all the distractions and "allure" her. When in Eze 20:33-34, it sounds like a lot of fury and anger; but notice *when* these emotions will be expressed, when bringing Israel out from among the nations.

In the second wilderness, God will "plead" or perhaps "reason" with Israel there.

2. God's desire is to turn that place of trespass, in the "Valley of Achor" (Joshua 7), into a door of hope. The Valley of Achor was a point of failure for the children of Israel but through repentance, God was able to change it into an opportunity for Israel to prosper!
3. God's desire is to be called "My husband" by us, not "My lord". Understand the difference, to me the term "husband" or "wife" connotes "family". Every time I read this section of scripture, I hear God saying, "I want us to be *family*," and my heart just *melts*. "I don't want you to live in fear of My power." Hallelujah!
4. God's desire is to be an attentive spouse, and He wants us to do the same. He wants to hear from us, and He wants us to *want* to hear from Him, and He wants this for the whole earth. This makes it obvious just how angry He was with the leaders of the children of Israel, that He was not going to allow them to even make inquiries of Him.

VV38-42

What will happen to the rebels and transgressors among the children of Israel?

Will the rebels be allowed to return to Israel?

Taking a step back, what was the complaint lodged against Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16?

What is the complaint in chapter 20? VV13, 21, 24

What are the two indictments against Jerusalem:

1. With regard to the relationship? Eze 16:38
2. With regard to the law? Eze 20:13

In V37, how does God say He will address #1?

In V38, how does God say He will address #2?

To what does God take particular exception – #1 or #2, according to V39?

So, *for now*, why doesn't #1 matter as much, according to VV40-42?

**LESSON:** Two breaches occur in each act of sin/trespass or transgression. There is a breach of relationship – a vow, *your word* is broken; and a breach of the Law – an imbalance is created in righteousness. There are a couple of stories from David's life that illustrate the concept. 2 Sam 12 (VV13-14); 24 (VV10-14).

In each of these stories, David immediately knows that he's offended God (his relationship with God is broken); and an atonement is made to reconcile the breach in righteousness and clean the slate.

Adam's trespass – on an individual level (murder of Abel), on a national level (Jerusalem's harlotry), and on a world-wide level (pride, violence, and wickedness) – created a breach in the relationship and an

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imbalance in righteousness. The requirements of the Law and reconciliation of the relationship were met in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – God’s holy Name is vindicated. And now, according to the Law of Atonement (Leviticus 16), blood must be spilled to cleanse the land (Num35:33-34). The law of atonement is the process of cleaning the slate among the children of Israel annually (Lev 16:32-34) – this is the process for cleaning the slate *for all time*.

The remission of sin takes place in two parts:

1. Addressing the sin itself, and
2. Cleansing *everything* that the sin defiled.

So, when we read in Dan 9:24, “Seventy weeks are determined upon they people and upon thy holy city, to:

1. Finish the transgression,
2. And to make an end of sins,
3. And to make reconciliation for iniquity,
4. And to bring in everlasting righteousness,
5. And to seal up the vision and prophecy,
6. And to anoint the most Holy.”

We know that an atonement sacrifice is part of the process of accomplishing these 6 things. I believe Ezekiel is describing the goat of sacrifice.

VV43-44

When will Jerusalem finally reflect on her past behavior?

How will it make her feel?

Is God extending mercy and going to such lengths for Jerusalem because she behaves perfectly?

Why does He not cast Jerusalem off forever?

Why does He still make the promise of Eze 16:60, according to V44?

VV45-48

What does God direct Ezekiel to do?

How many times is “south” mentioned in that first verse? What does it mean?

Who are the “forests” of the South?

What did we learn about trees from the Eze 17?

What is the message to these forests?

What is meant that “every face... shall be burned therein”?

Will there be any doubt that God is doing this?

**LESSON:** Here in chapter 20, God mentions the “south” three times in verse 46, which to me means punishment has been determined and it is done. What is this punishment? According to verse 47, a blazing fire in the south will set that will kill the well-watered, as well as the dry, trees.

From what we learned in the parable of two eagles in Ezekiel 17, trees, especially the tall trees, represent the leadership among the people, in this case, the south. Both green and dry trees (parable of the Vine Tree, Ezekiel 15) will get burned – both healthy and sick will be burned – such that every face from south to north will be burned.

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V49

What is the response of the recipients to the message?

What does Ezekiel think about this?

LESSON: I have always found this to be a hilarious part of this section of scripture. God has waxed so eloquent over the past chapters about how angry He is with Jerusalem, about Jerusalem's abominations, and why and how He will have to judge them. God explains what He doing in and through these people; and how all His actions are in fulfillment of the atonement sacrifice so that Jerusalem's, and the world's future is assured. And what is the response of these people? "Are we hearing Ezekiel correctly... he does talk in parables, doesn't he?"

This response even outraged *Ezekiel!* So different from the first chapters of this book.

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