

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## EZEKIEL 18-20

Tonight I want to test your jingle IQ... I'm going to list a few of the all-time best advertising jingles. I want you to fill in the blank, or tell me what's being advertising...

Here are ten of my favorites....

"Gimme a break, gimme a break, break me off a piece of that \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_." (Kit Kat Bar) "The best part of waking up is \_\_\_ in your cup." (Folgers) "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, O' what a relief it is." (Alka Seltzer) "Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions, on sesame seed bun." (McDonalds) "Fly the friendly skies of \_\_\_." (United) "Don't leave home without it." (American Express) "Be all that you can be." (US Army) "You're in good hands with \_\_\_." (Allstate) "Let your fingers do the walking through the \_\_\_ \_\_\_." (Yellow Pages) "Betcha' can't eat just one" (Lays Potato Chips)

Our list could go on and on. But tonight, we begin Chapter 18 with a popular jingle in the days of Ezekiel.

Chapter 18:1, "The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?" Here was a jingle that was popular among the Jews in Jerusalem, and the exiles in Babylon. It's also mentioned in Jeremiah 31:29.

*"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."* But what did it mean?

This Jewish jingle was an excuse. People used it to shift the blame from themselves to their parents.

In short, the Jews were saying, *“there’s and evil taste in my mouth because my dad sucked sour grapes...”*

Though it’s been a while since anyone has heard this jingle, it’s philosophy is as popular today as ever...

Let’s blame our problems on our upbringing!

Several years ago, family advocate, James Dobson wrote, *“(Parents and) mothers especially, have been blamed for everything that can go wrong with children.*

*Even when love and commitment are incalculable, the experts accuse moms of making grievous errors in toilet training, disciplining, feeding, medicating, and educating their youngsters. They are either over-possessive or undernourishing. No matter how diligently ‘Mom’ is in parenting, she seems destined to be accused of twisting and warping her children.”*

Psychiatrists are quick to probe a person’s past and identify their parent’s mistakes - and thus, blame all the person’s present problems on their mom and dad.

One beleaguered parent moaned, *“We were children when everything was the child’s fault. Now we’re parents when everything is the parent's fault.”* **“Blame your problems on your parents”** is still a popular cry!

I’m not suggesting that fathers and mothers aren’t a formidable influence in the shaping of their children's lives, but often their power is seen as insurmountable.

You've heard the adage, "Abused children inevitably become child abusers." That's a wrong assumption.

Research shows that happens only 30% of the time. *Your past doesn't have to dictate your future.*

Today, victimization has even become a legal defense. Because of past deprivation, or abuse, or prejudice the guilty person couldn't help what he or she did, and shouldn't be held accountable for their actions.

Yet, even the most horrible upbringing can't be used as an excuse to avoid sin and it's responsibilities.

That defense may work in American courtrooms, but it certainly doesn't work in God's court. The saving, healing, and strengthening power of Jesus is available to everyone who calls on His name, that's why no one can use their past as an excuse for their present!

In the remainder of Chapter 18 Ezekiel is going to drill down on this theme of Individual accountability.

Verse 3, "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die." Or as the old saying goes, "Every tub must sit on its own bottom."

Everyone is responsible for his or hers own actions.

And to prove it, Ezekiel tells the story of three men: *a godly man, his ungodly son, and his godly grandson.*

Verse 5, "But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right; if he has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted up his

eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor's wife, nor approached a woman during her impurity; if he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to the debtor his pledge; has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; if he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase, but has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man; if he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments faithfully - He is just; He shall surely live!" says the Lord God." God is commending the man who has lived by His Law.

Verse 10, "If he begets a son who is a robber or a shedder of blood, who does any of these things and does none of those duties, but has eaten on the mountains or defiled his neighbor's wife; if he has oppressed the poor and needy, robbed by violence, not restored the pledge, lifted his eyes to the idols, or committed abomination; if he has exacted usury or taken increase - shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him." A rebellious son doesn't get any credit for his father's righteousness. He stands or falls by what he does, not what his father did.

And "If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise..." Here's the possibility... if you've got rotten, wicked parents, you don't have to be like them.

Through the power of Jesus you can rise above your parents, and establish a new precedent - new patterns.

You can build a new life for yourself.

Years ago, Morgan Cryar, wrote a song entitled, “Break The Chains.” The lyrics make Ezekiel’s point...

“Suzy's daddy just nags and shouts, she yells back then they have it out. She wants to run away and get married real bad, but her boyfriend Joe is just like Dad... Billy is another kid right across town. His dad left his mom 'cause she held him down.’ To think about his father just drives him mad, but he uses his girlfriend just like dad... "Little Jan was a battered child. She used to hide out while her mama went wild. Will she raise the seeds that her mama has sown? What's she gonna do with kids of her own?” Then the chorus...

"Sometimes sin is just a family tradition. But it'll burn the family tree to the ground. Nobody wants to inherit the flame. You sure don't want to pass it down.

So break the chain, cut the cord, end the curse, stop the rain. The family sin will do you in; better break the chain.” *And you can through the power of Jesus Christ!*

In Ezekiel’s parable, this grandson was doing exactly that - he was breaking the family chain of sin.

Verse 15 continues to describe the grandson’s desire to do right... “Who has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor’s wife; has not oppressed anyone, nor withheld a pledge, nor robbed by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; who has withdrawn his hand from the poor and not received usury or increase, but has executed My judgments and walked in My statutes - he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall

surely live! “As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.’ In other words, each man - *the dad, son, and grandson* - is held accountable for his own behavior.

As a side note... it sounds like Ezekiel’s parable was based on a succession of Jewish kings in his day.

Hezekiah was a godly king. His son, Manasseh, was a wicked idolater. Yet Manasseh’s prominent successor was Josiah, one of the most godly of all Israel’s kings.

“Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.”

Here’s a wonderful example of God’s mercy and grace. Yes, people are responsible for their actions, but people can change. God is always ready and willing to forgive and give life to a person with a repentant heart.



Verse 23, “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? “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live?

All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.” Just as a sinful man can change and follow God, so can a righteous man digress into rebellion, and suffer God’s punishment.

Verse 25, “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”

Again, one of the ways mankind was made in God’s image was our ability to choose. Of all His creation, God gave to mankind the ability to make moral choices. Unlike the plants and animals we’re self-determinate beings... the captain of our own destiny.

In an era of genetic engineering and sophisticated biochemistry, people are being told that their past is irrevocable. Nobody can escape their genetic make-up.

*“I was born this way,”* is the familiar refrain. Even if it’s a deviance that God forbids, or is damaging to the person, they’re encouraged to accept it, don’t buck it.

You’re nothing but a mutation of inherited genes.

But that’s not what God says about us! We were created in His image and given a free will. We don’t have to be enslaved by inbred tendencies or past programming, with God’s help we can break the chain!

Verse 29, *“Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?”*

*“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,”* says the Lord God.

*“Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?”* God doesn’t relish judging anyone. It’s God’s will for us all to follow Him.

Perhaps you’re an alcoholic, from a long-line of alcoholics... maybe you have a same-sex attraction you’ve had for as long as you can remember... God’s will and ways still apply to you! *And you can change!*

You might feel that you’re trapped - you’re boxed in to a destructive lifestyle - you feel powerless.



But you can be the person God intends. He says in verse 31, *“get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.”* *Even if we are born a certain way, we can be born again!* This was made possible through the New Covenant. It was paid for by Jesus on the cross. And we receive a new heart by trusting Him and His Spirit.

Ezekiel closes the chapter in verse 32, quoting God, *“For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,”* says the Lord God. *“Therefore turn and live!”*

As 2 Peter 3:9 tells us, God is *“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*

God does have a jingle, but not, *‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’?* His jingle is 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

**Ezekiel 19** is a lamentation. It’s set to a melancholy beat. In the Hebrew it has the rhythm and meter of a funeral dirge... In the chapter God is mourning the demise of the Davidic dynasty of Hebrew monarchs.

King Jeconiah was a prisoner in Babylon. Uncle Zedekiah was ruling in his place, but his days were numbered. For the first time in 400 years Judah is about to be without a sitting king on David’s throne.

And given the promises tied to this dynasty - of the Messiah and His kingdom - this was reason to weep!

Verse 1, “Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say: ‘What is your mother? A lioness: she lay down among the lions; among the young lions she nourished her cubs.” Throughout both the OT and NT the symbol of the tribe of Judah is that of a lion. Genesis 49:9, “Judah is a lion’s whelp.”

Recall Jesus was born of Judah, and in Revelation 5 He’s referred to as, “the lion of the tribe of Judah.”

Judah is a lioness, and her cubs are her kings!

“She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a young lion; he learned to catch prey, and he devoured men. The nations also heard of him; he was trapped in their pit, and they brought him with chains to the land of Egypt. ‘When she saw that she waited, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion.” Here, a little history goes a long ways...

When King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho in the valley of Megiddo, his son, Jehoahaz, assumed the throne of Judah. But he was anti-Egyptian. He was soon deposed by the Pharaoh and taken as prisoner to Egypt. The cub that replaced him was King Jeconiah.

Verse 6, “He roved among the lions, and became a young lion; he learned to catch prey; he devoured men.

He knew their desolate places, and laid waste their cities; the land with its fullness was desolated by the noise of his roaring. Then the nations set against him from the provinces on every side, and spread their net over him; he was trapped in their pit. They put him in a cage with chains, and brought

him to the king of Babylon; they brought him in nets, that his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.”

Apparently, King Jeconiah thought he was bigger and badder than he was. He picked on the power to the east, the Babylonians. But that didn't last long.

He was king just three months. In 597 BC the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took Jeconiah to Babel in shackles. *No lie'n... the lion was subdued!*

The Hebrew word for “*chains*” in verse 9 is literally “*hooks*.” It was common for conquered kings to be disgraced and humiliated by treating them as animals.

One Assyrian king once wrote of his conquered foe, “*I put him into a kennel. With jackals and dogs I tied him up...*” This seems to be how the Babylonians treated Jeconiah. They put a hook in his nose, and carried him away in a cage - as they would do to a lion.

Verse 10, ‘*Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline, planted by the waters, fruitful and full of branches because of many waters. She had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick branches, and was seen in her height amid the dense foliage.*’ Here the vine Ezekiel speaks of is the Davidic bloodline - King David's successors.

For four centuries Judah had been a sovereign nation, ruled over by a powerful branch of monarchs.

And they stood out among the nations of the Earth.

“But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried her fruit.

Her strong branches were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. Fire has come out from a rod of her branches and devoured her fruit, so that she has no strong branch - a scepter for ruling.” This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.”

King Jeconiah was the last of David’s successors. Zedekiah was his uncle - not really the rightful heir.

And this was a reason for mourning... Jeconiah lived out his days in Babylon. For most of the time he lived in a Babylonian jail. He was freed later in life, but he never returned to Jerusalem to sit on his throne again.

With Jeconiah’s fall, the Davidic dynasty nearly came to an end. In fact, for the next 2500 years David has lacked a man, or a “*strong branch*” - “*a scepter for ruling.*” This is shocking. In 2 Samuel 7 God promised David he would never lack a man to sit on his throne.

Yet even though the throne of David has been empty for two millennium - in reality, David has never been short a successor. Jesus was born of David’s lineage.

Jesus is of the proper vine (*or bloodline*), and though He had no political aspirations at his first coming, when He returns Jesus will rule as *an unbreakable branch*.

Jesus will restore the kingdom to Judah, and the throne to His family, David. He is the “*strong branch!*”

In **Chapter 20** you'll notice the prophecies of Ezekiel pick up an intensity. These are the last judgments before the fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 20-23 record God's final warnings. Chapter 24 records the fateful day itself. These judgments were uttered in August 591 BC - 3.5 years before the siege of the city began.

Chapter 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.” Remember, for years the elders of Judah had rejected Ezekiel and Jeremiah’s warnings of a coming judgment. They believed the false prophets that all was okay - God would deliver...

But now they were beginning to reconsider. Perhaps they’d made a mistake. Verse 2, “Then 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: “Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” says the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you.”” *And what a shocker!* How would you respond if you sought the Lord in prayer, and He wouldn’t take your call?

Realize, these elders wanted to be able to *have their cake and eat it too*. They weren’t really willing to give up their idols, but they definitely desired God’s help.

Whenever a person puts a call into God and God refuses to take it, understand it’s not that God doesn’t desire to help. He does! But **God’s help and holiness never come separate**. They’re always packaged together. If you want God’s help you need to be holy.

And what that means is “set apart to Him” - not perfect, but *dedicated, committed to do life His way*. This is why the psalmist cries out in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear.”

Verse 4, “Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers.” I’m sure you’ve heard the saying, “Those who refuse to learn from history, are destined to repeat history.” This happened to Judah.

They never learned from the evil of their fathers - but repeated it, and were now suffering the consequences.

Verse 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.’ 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.” God took an oath. It was a marriage vow between Him and Israel.

“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.’ 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.’ 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.”

Verse 10, “Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.” Here's an interesting insight on the Hebrew's 400 years of slavery in Egypt you don't glean from Moses' writings.

While in Egypt, the Hebrews worshipped the idols of their captors. And God became angry. He contemplated wiping them out, but He didn't want the Gentiles, the Egyptians, to view Him as cruel or unfair.

So He delivered the Hebrews. And remember how He did it... *with ten plagues!* Don't think of the plagues as random judgments. They were specifically designed to show God's superiority over the idols of Egypt...

In Egypt, the Nile River was sacred. It was their lifeline. It was believed to be the bloodstream of Osiris, god of the underworld. Yet when Yahweh the Hebrew God turned it to blood it got the Egyptian's attention.

The Egyptian goddess, Heqt, took the form of a frog. And in sending the plague of frogs God was saying if you want to worship a frog, then I'll send lots and lots of frogs - *until you croak!* It was an attack on their idols.

The plague of lice was especially designed to make the priests of Egypt unclean, and thus unable to offer sacrifices in an attempt to solicit the help of their idols.

The most sacred of all Egyptian deities was Apis or the bull. The pestilence that killed the livestock was an attack on Apis, and proved that he was *a bunch of bull*.

The Pharaoh himself was considered a god, and thus when God struck the firstborn, He struck his heir. Again, proving His superiority over the gods of Egypt.

Through the ten plagues, God wasn't just shaking loose the grip of Pharaoh, He had two other purposes..

He was showing His own people, Israel, the folly of their idolatrous ways... And He was proving His power and sovereignty to the Gentile nations who were looking on at the Exodus as a test among deities.

In Joshua 2 Rahab tells the two spies that when the Canaanites heard of God's victory in Egypt, "our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." The Exodus didn't just free Israel, but shook up the nations.

It's interesting how echoes of the Exodus still shape our world 3500 years later. Do you know why *Friday the 13th* is considered so unlucky? The first Passover was on a Sabbath, Nisan 14. Thus, the death of the firstborn was on Friday the 13th. It still influences us.

Verse 11, "And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.' 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." The Sabbath was the symbol of

God's Old Covenant with Israel. This is why He placed such emphasis on the Sabbath day.

Unlike the other nations of the world, Israel rested one day in seven. They trusted in God's provision.

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

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." *What would it say to the nations of the Earth if God wiped out the people He just chose?*

"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, because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols." God didn't give up on Israel, but He did punish them for forty years. They wandered in the wilderness.

"Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness.

"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. I am the Lord your God: walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.'

“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.” The first generation of Hebrews died in the desert, but God tried again with their children. Sadly, they were just as disobedient.

Notice the phrase that pops up three times in these verses, “*which, if a man does, he shall live by them...*”

Paul quotes this verse in Galatians 3:12, “*the man who does them shall live by them.*” Paul is speaking of the legalist, who attempts to be right with God through his own performance and adherence to the law.

Paul uses the phrase to say, if you keep the law for that purpose, then you better keep *all the Law, all of the time*. If the Law is your standard, God will hold you to it all... “*the man who does them shall live by them.*” Instead, Paul’s hope was not in keeping the Law. His trust was in God’s grace. He lived by faith, not by works. *Grace and Law are like oil and water, Tech and Georgia, bare feet and leggos - they don’t mix.*

Verse 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.*” God saved Israel because of His concern for the salvation of the other nations.

“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...” Even before the Israelites stepped foot in the Promised Land, God promised them if they didn’t obey Him He’d eventually cast them out and scatter them among the nations. [Read Deuteronomy 28!](#)

“Because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers’ idols.

“Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live; 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.”

“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. 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.”

If you’re just reading this superficially, you might ask *what's the big deal?* They enjoyed mountain scenery and liked thick forests? But the Canaanite system of idolatry was centered around high hills (or high places), and they planted groves of trees around their altars.

God is saying that when His people entered the land, all they did was substitute their Egyptian gods for the idols of the Canaanites. The land of Canaan was dominated by fertility gods and goddesses. Rain, good growing seasons, reproduction were all thought to be governed by the gods. That's why their groves of trees were usually trimmed in the form of phallic symbols.

The rituals that went along with these fertility cults were sexual and immoral - and broke God's heart.

Verse 29, "Then I said to them, 'What is this high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day.'" The Hebrew word for "high place" is "bamah" which sounded like two words "ba" or go, and "mah" which means "wither." So it meant, "wherever you go."

Some scholars believed the expression was a pun.

In essence it was like saying, "when you go to the high place you're going nowhere." And of course, this holds true of every attraction in life other than Jesus. To live your life without Jesus is to go nowhere.

I like described my life before I came to Jesus, "I was going nowhere and getting there fast." And it's true.

Verse 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? 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.'" A component of Canaanite idolatry



was child sacrifice. This is how they worshipped the idol, Molech.

Now God gets back to where He started in verse 3.

“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. 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.’”

Idolatry had been a big part of Israel’s past, but not her future. God has plans to cure His people of idolatry.

“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. 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. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. 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.”

Realize, Jerusalem is on the verge of a siege and a scattering at the hands of the Babylonians. Yet this prophecy looks beyond the local and immediate.

Ezekiel predicts a regathering of Jews, not simply from exile in Babylon, but from “*countries*” (plural).

This is why I believe Ezekiel is prophesying of the end times Jews - and a regathering to Israel that will occur at the end of the Great Tribulation. Notice, God will plead His case with these Jews in the same place He pleaded His case when He brought them out of Egypt. *That wilderness* is spoken of in

Isaiah 16. It's in the south of Israel - near the rock city of Petra. In Petra God will plead with these future Jews face to face.

When Jesus returns to Earth, according to Zechariah He'll set His foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. He eventually reign from Jerusalem for 1000 years.

But according to Isaiah 63 He's first seen coming up from Bozrah (*which is the wilderness, or Petra*), and according to Ezekiel 20 it's there He'll plead His case to them, face to face. Zechariah 12:10 says it another way, **"They will look on (Him) whom they have pierced."**

Imagine, Jesus coming to the Jews in Petra and showing them the nail scars in His hands and side. He'll plead with His people, and they'll repent of their rebellion. The Jews will embrace Him as their Messiah.

Jesus will lead the Jews triumphantly into Jerusalem where He'll reestablish the throne of David, and for the first time since 597 BC and King Jeconiah, the proper Davidic descendent will sit on the throne of Israel.

Verse 37, **"I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant..."**

**"Passing under the rod"** is a phrase borrowed from shepherding. A shepherd cares for his sheep. He counts them by herding them one at time under a rod.

And according to John 10, our Good Shepherd Jesus, knows His sheep by name and leads them one by one. He has a personal relationship with us.

Verse 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.” The end times has more shepherd imagery.

In Matthew 25 we're told that it's in the last days that Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats... He cull out those who follow His Word, from those who don't.

“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.”

In other words, if they want to serve idols, then go serve idols. But no more can they *have their cake and eat it too*. The Jews can no longer hold *God's gifts and their idols* in the same hand. It's one or the other...

Verse 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.” Notice what marks their return to God and the genuineness of their commitment to Him... *the offering of their firstfruits*...

God's people were willing to give back to God the first portion of what He'd given them. It was their **tithe**.

And this is what marks the genuineness of *our* faith.

Are we willing to give God the first of what He's given us? Before we pay our bills, or plan a vacation, or put our kids through college, are we willing to write God a check for just a tenth of what He's given us?

Do we have the faith to say, "God, you can do more with 90% of my income, than I can do with 100%."

If we aren't willing to give God a portion of what we earn, can we really say we're giving Him all of our life?

He continues in verse 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. 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. 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." Israel will be humble. "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."

"Furthermore the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward the south (in Hebrew the word is "Negev" - it's the southern region of the Promised Land); preach against the south and prophesy against the forest land, the South, and say to the forest of the South, 'Hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree and

every dry tree in you; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched by it. All flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.”” God will bring a fiery judgment against the cities of the Negev - those south of Jerusalem - the southernmost parts of Judah.

“Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! They say of me, ‘Does he not speak parables?’” In Chapter 20 Ezekiel had quoted their jingle. He’d used several parables and metaphors. Even here, “*fire*” is a symbol of judgment.

But one of the ways, the people could dismiss what He said, was by criticizing how he said it - *his style*.

*“Ah, Ezekiel is too symbolic for us. He tells too many stories. We need something that will speak to us more directly...”*

Well, it’s best to be careful what you ask for... that’s exactly what God gives them in Chapter 21.

Next week, Ezekiel delivers a blistering judgment.