**Ezekiel 20: A Long History of Grace**

**Introduction**

Ezekiel is in Babylon captivity (593 BC) a few years before the complete destruction which came on Jerusalem. He message is to those in captivity. God warns him that his call is not an easy one and the people are incredibly stubborn. There are times that the elders will come and inquire of the Lord through Ezekiel.

* 8:1: Elder sitting before Ezekiel
* 14:1: Elder sitting before Ezekiel (to inquire of God according to 14:3)
* 20:1: Elders came to inquire of the Lord

What was the elders question? Why were they inquiring of God? We do NOT know! Perhaps part of the reason that it is not recorded is because God says He will not answer their question (14:3; 20:3). Neither the elders nor the nation are serving God, so God refuses to answer (for other examples see 1 Sam 14:37; 28:6, 15 [Saul]; Jer 11:9-11; Mic 3:4, 7).

**1. Pattern of Nation’s Rebellion**

* God makes Himself known
* God gives instructions
* Nation violates specific commands of God
* God almost destroys, but spares

***God’s anger with the people does not stem from just a few recent issues but from a long history of rebellion***. God reviews the nation’s history until modern day:

* 20:5-9: Israel in Egypt
* 20:10-17: Israel in wilderness (1st Generation)
* 20:18-26: Israel in wilderness (2nd Generation)
* 20:27-32: Modern day nation

***Israel’s violations***

* Idolatry (20:7, 28, 32)
* My statutes and ordinances (20:11, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24)
* Violation of My sabbaths (20:16, 21, 24)
* Blasphemed (20:27)

On the surface level, we might say that this is not very surprising. After all, we are accustomed to viewing Israel’s history as one of rebellion against God. We know there were some good moments where the nation does follow God but this is the picture we are generally used to. Many times when the prophets review their own history (even in the NT) it is through the lens of rebellion. So, in some ways what Ezekiel does is not unique.

However, one thing worth noting is Ezekiel begins the story of rebellion IN Egypt not the wilderness! Israel know God from their earliest point and knew they should be loyal only to Him and yet they defiled themselves with the idols of Egypt (20:7-8). The point I think Ezekiel is making is that your rebellion has been from the very origin of the nation.

**2. Underlying Message of Grace**

While the nation is being rebuked for their rebellion, I think in some ways the prophet is trying to show the nation their story could be told through a lens of God showing them grace. Note the continual emphasis on God sparing the people:

* 20:8b-9: God was going to destroy Israel while they were IN EGYPT!
* 20:13b-14: God was going to destroy in the wilderness
* 20:21b-22: God spared them and brought them into the promised land
* Consider how many times God spares the nation after they enter the promised land

God’s grace does not mean there are not consequences for sin

* 20:15: Die in the wilderness
* 20:23: Warning of captivity in wilderness
* They are in captivity now!

The story of the nation can be told through the lens of giving Israel chance after chance. The story of the nation is grace upon grace. But the problem is that you never really responded appropriately to God’s grace. They received grace and persisted in sin (opposite of what Rom 6:1-2 calls us to do)! Grace demands the proper response! So, how should Israel have responded?

**3. Response to Grace**

In 20:32-44, there is a picture of removing the bad and restoring the nation to a spiritual focus. As God restores the nation it gives a picture of how the nation will respond.

a) Horrified (20:43-44)

The nation will reflect on their actions that have led them to this point and will be appalled at what they have done. You will remember how you defiled yourself and all the evil you have done, and the result will be that you will know the Lord and you will be thankful for the way He has dealt with you. You will be thankful for the grace and the discipline. For once the nation will respond correctly to the grace they have received.

This is the proper way to respond to the grace of God. We realize our wrong and are thankful for the way that God has acted to save us.