

## EZEKIEL 20

## ANOTHER MESSAGE TO THE ELDERS

A new series of prophecies begins here in this chapter, and stretches to the close of the twenty-fourth chapter. The entire series is of a peculiarly dark and threatening character, interspersed with only a few occasional gleams of light and distant prospects of good. No substantial amendment had been produced among the people by the earlier communications of Ezekiel, or by the contemporary efforts of other servants of God. Hence the people's guilt had become much greater, and the time had drawn nearer for the execution of judgment; and so the burden which the prophet now had to deliver was even more fearfully charged with warnings of rapidly-approaching woe.

The occasion which prompted this series of discourses was furnished by certain of the elders of Israel coming to inquire of the Lord through the prophet. But again, a preliminary objection arose because of the low moral condition of the persons who were inquiring, for it precluded them from any right to expect a friendly response from God to their desire for information. Hence He called upon the prophet to behave toward them as a judge by charging upon them the rebellious spirit of their forefathers, and by showing them how little they and their ancestors had received in chastisement from God, compared with what they truly deserved.

The first great division of the chapter consists of the words that came from the lips of the prophet as he fulfilled this office of judgment. It extends from verses 5-32; and it contains an overview of the history of Israel, in several sections – in each of which, the same spirit of rebellion and idolatry is substantially charged upon the people, which repeatedly drew down the severity of God upon them; but which was also repeatedly tempered and restrained by manifestations of His mercy. Sadly, the spirit of apostacy among God's Old Testament people had reached its climax in the time of Ezekiel's generation. They were not satisfied with merely treading in the footsteps of their fathers, but they were even aspiring to a perfect conformity to heathen customs of idol-worship – as if it were a privilege that they were ambitious to obtain! They even stooped so low as to dedicate their own children to these horrid, hideous false deities by committing them to the flames, in honor of these disgusting and bloodthirsty idols. It was bad enough to simply mingle the worship of Jehovah and Baal together, as their forefathers had done; but now they were entirely on the same footing with the wretched idolaters, who bowed down to wood and stone.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The elders of the people come to Ezekiel, and sit down before him – verse 1-4*
- ❖ *The people are charged with idolatry and rebellion throughout their whole history – verses 5-32*
- ❖ *God would deal with them with a mixture of mercy and severity – verses 33-44*
- ❖ *A rather obscure parable is delivered to the prophet – verses 45-49*

Having thus fulfilled the office of judgment, and having disclosed with all plainness the estimation in which the Lord held the people of Israel; the prophet thenceforth proceeds to the second great division of his message (verses 33-44). And the leading theme of this portion of the chapter was to make known the mingled goodness and severity with which the Lord was now going to deal with them, so that He might thoroughly wean them away from their abominations, and bring them into a state in which He would bless them and do them good. Ezekiel essentially tells they people that their sinful cravings after heathenish pollutions were being revived all over again. It was the same sin that they had committed all throughout the history of their nation; but now it only varied in outward forms, as the changed circumstances of the times might require. And they were now sinking once again into bondage and affliction, out of which they would eventually be brought. But the sharp discipline would sift, purge, and prepare them for the state of peace and rest which they desired. The perfected condition to which matters were to be brought presents itself to the prophet's view in the form of a revival of the "old paths." He foresaw the regenerated people, the pure and acceptable worship, and the glorious inheritance of blessing. But he saw more than the mere return of the best of these things from the past; it was to be the full bringing in of what had never been found among God's people before, except in a partial sense. By the new and better state of things which have been introduced by the Gospel, the Lord's holy Mount Zion has risen to a nobler elevation than the hills of Jerusalem; and the Lord's people have passed beyond the boundaries of the land of Canaan, and spread themselves far and wide in the earth. The Lord's holy mountain – namely, the Gospel-Church – is the place where Jesus brings all His redeemed ones, and where they are all accepted in Him. And the sweet savor of His Person, blood, and righteousness is the one gracious cause whereby they shall all be gathered, blessed, and made everlastingly happy! Wherever there is a believer in Christ, there is a genuine member of the family of Israel; he or she is a pure worshiper coming to Mount Zion, and a free-born citizen who descends from the spiritual heritage of God's servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

The closing verses of this chapter (verses 45-49) contain a word that came from the Lord to the prophet, but it is very obscure and difficult to interpret. It obviously speaks of a severe and consuming judgment from the Lord upon the inhabitants of some land situated somewhere to the south of the prophet. But who precisely were the people that were to experience this judgment? The vision is entirely silent concerning those points; but in the next chapter, he obtains from the Lord what may be regarded as a duplicate of this vision – except that therein, it is made perfectly clear who the objects of the foreseen calamities were.

*Lord, help us to never turn aside after idols, but cause us to always be found in Your holy mountain – the Gospel-Church! Amen.*

