

GOD’S LAMENTATION OVER ISRAEL’S PRINCES

This is a lamentation of God that He has Ezekiel proclaim to the Israelites. It speaks of Israel specifically the tribe of Judah which was the kingly line of Israel (Gen 49:9). The lamentation deals specifically with the captivity of king Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) and king Jehoiachin (597 B.C.) and the final collapse of the Davidic dynasty under Zedekiah (586 B.C.).

19:1-4 *“As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel and say, ‘What was your mother? A lioness among lions! She lay down among young lions, She reared her cubs. ‘When she brought up one of her cubs, he became a lion, and he learned to tear his prey; he devoured men.’ Then nations heard about him; he was captured in their pit, and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt.’”*

Judah is seen as a lioness among lions where she laid down to rear her cubs. Israel was surrounded by heathen nations who had much influence on her “cubs” or princes. The first mentioned cub is Jehoahaz who began to rule in 609 B.C. and did evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Ki 23:32-34; 2Chr 36:2) He was deposed by Pharaoh Neco after only 3 months.

19:5-9 *“When she saw, as she waited, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. And he walked about among the lions; he became a young lion, he learned to tear his prey; he devoured men. He destroyed their fortified towers and laid waste their cities; and the land and its fullness were appalled because of the sound of his roaring. Then nations set against him on every side from their provinces, and they spread their net over him; he was captured in their pit. They put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him in hunting nets so that his voice would be heard no more on the mountains of Israel.”*

This is Jehoiachin who also was a wicked king who after only 3 months of oppressive rule was taken in a cage to Babylon where he was imprisoned for 37 years. (2Ki 25:27-30; Jer 52:31,32).

19:10-14 *“Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard, planted by the waters; it was fruitful and full of branches because of abundant waters. And it had strong branches fit for scepters of rulers, and its height was raised above the clouds so that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches. But it was plucked up in fury; It was cast down to the ground; and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong branch was torn off so that it withered; the fire consumed it. And now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And fire has gone out from its branch; It has consumed its shoots and fruit, so that there is not in it a strong branch, a scepter to rule.” This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.”*

Israel is again represented by a vine planted by the Lord and was blessed abundantly by the Lord. Many kings were given to Israel, but it has been a long path to total destruction the final of which will be on king Zedekiah’s shoulders because of his utter wickedness. The east wind is referring to the final siege of Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar. After the fall of the Davidic dynasty there has been no real king in Israel for 2600 years. While Jesus is the promised eternal King of David’s line, Israel rejected Him. He fulfilled the role

Savior and will fulfill the role as the promised King of David's line when He returns to rule in Zion.

REHEARSING GODS DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL'S REBELLION

20:1-3 *“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. 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.’”*

We often think of the Lord as always waiting anxiously to answer questions and petitions without giving a lot of regard to the manner in which we approach Him. God resists the proud (Hab 2:4; Jam 4:6; 1Pe 5:5; etc.) While the Lord is patient and exhorts man to repent, there is a point at which the Lord's patience will give way to judgement. In the case with Israel at this point in Ezekiel's writing, judgement has already been determined. The case is being presented to make the point that God is just in what is going to be carried out against Israel. The Lord now presents an historic overview of Israel's rebellion.

IN EGYPT

20:4-9 *“Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers; 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. 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.”*

One of the realities of the stay as slaves in Egypt was the bondage to idolatry that the Israelites were in. The fact that they turned to idols in the wilderness was not a first for them, they were simply returning to practices that they had already been familiar with in Egypt. The Lord constantly links their deliverance with His reputation; His name. The purpose for the choosing of a nation for His name was to demonstrate His glory through His chosen people to the nations. Ambassadorship is always intended to promote the represented. Believers in Jesus are called to the same ambassadorship.

Do we bring glory to the name of Christ?

IN THE WILDERNESS

20:10-17 *“So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. 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. Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands, because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols. Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness.”*

Besides breaking the law, the Israelites profaned the sabbaths. The sabbath was established in Genesis as a way for man to draw close to the Lord by keeping himself from all the distractions of the world. In the same way that Esau profaned his birthright, the Israelites had not kept the sabbath and demonstrated that drawing close to God was not that important.

While the body of Christ is not under the law, the sabbath precluded the law and what we should be obligated to, at least in commitment out of love and gratitude, is spending time with the Lord while free from all earthly distractions. By doing this we honor Him rather than profaning the provision of God to make Himself known to us.

Notice how His name was profaned in the sight of the nations. The obedience or disobedience of God’s people is observed by others. The Lord dealt with the rebellious generation in the wilderness as He entered into judgement with them there. Still he remains faithful for His names sake to preserve a remnant. He brought the next generation into the promised land.

IN THE SECOND GENERATION

20:18-26 *“I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols. ‘I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them. ‘Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’ “But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out. Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse*

“them among the lands, because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. “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.””

The second generation proved to be like the first. This is a good example of what the Lord meant by “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation”. They were given over to their own statutes and ordinances by which they polluted themselves. We become like that which we worship (ps 115:8; 135:18). In this case they became like Molech who craved innocent blood. The Lord again makes a reference to all of His judgements on Israel including the diaspora. It is through both judgement and deliverance that the Lord is made known. Idols have power to do nothing.

UPON ENTERING CANAAN

20:27-29 *“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. When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings. Then I said to them, ‘What is the high place to which you go?’ So its name is called Bamah to this day.”””*

The mandate that the Lord had given to the Israelites was to cleanse the land of the inhabitants who were wicked and given over to idolatry which involved perverted sexual activity that reflected on the historic events of Genesis 6. Rather than cleansing the land of such practices and drawing close to the Lord they became immersed in them. Bamah means “high place”, but broken down ba means “to go” and mah means “where”. All of their carved perverted icons in high places will get them nowhere.

EZEKIEL’S GENERATION

20:30-32 *““Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things? When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? 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.’””*

Israel in Ezekiel’s time was no different. As we have seen throughout Ezekiel word from God to this point they had even exceeded the wickedness of previous generations. Again God’s anger is made clear by His refusal to be inquired of by them. Jesus was inquired of by a wicked and adulterous generation to perform more “magic tricks” for those who only sought after a sign or a wonder without really seeking after God.

Jesus had described the heart of God toward His people as a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings, but their rebellion in the rejection of Jesus as the Christ would lead to the great scattering that lasted about 1900 years. His arrival was precisely given by Gabriel to Daniel in the 70 weeks prophecy. Several times Jesus evaded attempts to make Him king, but when the time was right, He did allow Himself to be presented that way in fulfillment of prophecy, yet His presentation as King was not typical:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zech 9:9

As a result the realities of that which will eventually make for the peace of Jerusalem was hidden from their eyes (Luke 19:41,42) and will be until the future day when their eyes will be opened (Rom 11:26).

THE DIASPORA AND SELECTIVE RETURN

20:33-39 *“As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord GOD. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD. 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.””*

“I shall be king over you” - This declaration is based on His covenant, not man’s choice. It may seem to many that Israel has lost all connection with God because of their rejection of Jesus as their King, but all that will be brought about in their future judgement will bring Israel into humble repentance and belief. The diaspora was predicted as early as Deuteronomy 30:1-11.

The regathering is predicted in stages as we will see in Ezekiel 36. Isaiah 11:11-16 talks specifically about the regathering “the second time”. The doors were opened to begin this on My 14, 1948. Isaiah 66:8 states: “Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? ...”

God says He will bring them “into the wilderness of the peoples” in order to enter into judgement with them “face to face”. They had played the harlot with all the nations around them but in their regathering the nations are a wilderness. In other words they have no friends amongst the nations. They will find no comfort in allies. All of the surrounding nations will be against them as God enters into judgement with them. The inhabitants of the land today are seen as rebels. While they have been brought out of the land where they

sojourned, they will not enter the kingdom. Only those who are saved remnant. As Ezekiel pronounces all of this rebellion and judgement, He reminds them that in the future Israel “will surely listen” to the Lord.

Being “passed under the rod” is a reference to a shepherd who his counts sheep as they enter the sheepfold. Matt 25:31-40 speaks of the judgement of the sheep and the goats. Again while the Jews are being regathered to the land, it will only be the true sheep who will enter the land (see Ps 50:1-7; Mal 3:2-5; 4:1-2).

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

20:40-44 *“For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,” declares the Lord GOD, “there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things. As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done. Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord GOD.”*

This cannot be confused with anything other than national Israel in the future. The same Israel that Paul says will be saved. They are distinct amongst the nations in the future for God’s holy names sake. As a result of the judgement that the Lord carries out on Israel, the remnant will be saved. Israel as a distinct nation deserves to be completely cut off from God (as do all men), but God will be glorified when He deals out mercy and keeps His covenant. The contrite condition realizes personal sin and loathes it. This is completely opposed to the man - centered theology that is so pervasive today.

REMINDER OF JUDGEMENT

20:45-49 *“Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face toward Teman, and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev, and say to the forest of the Negev, ‘Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the blazing flame will not be quenched and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it. “All flesh will see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.””’” Then I said, “Ah Lord GOD! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not just speaking parables?’”’”*

In the Hebrew bible, these verses are actually the beginning of chapter 21. Fire speaks of judgement that will affect both the spiritually fruitful (green tree) and the spiritually unfruitful (dry tree). Ezekiel seems to ask God to be more clear with this than a parabolic form and chapter 21 does that.