

EZEKIEL: BLOSSOMING DURING LIFE'S MOST SEVERE CRISES

Part IX: God's Gracious Success In Discipling Very Rebellious People

(Ezekiel 20:1-44)

I. Introduction

- A. One of the remarkable challenges in the process of making disciples is the matter of hurdling overt stubbornness, dullness and rebellion toward the Lord. If an ignorant person from a dreadful background is at least **willing** to learn, we can make headway in discipling. But if he doesn't **want** to respond, or if he desires to manipulate God or His messenger, the discipling process seems to grind to a grand halt!
- B. Ezekiel faced this problem in Ezekiel 20:1-44, and God's grace and power are presented in the chapter to offset this crisis, offering hope for the rebellious and those who seek to disciple them as well!

II. God's Gracious Success In Discipling Very Rebellious People, Ezekiel 20:1-44:

- A. Ezekiel faced discipling very callused, carnal elders of the captive Hebrew people, Ez. 20:1-4a:
 - 1. A group of elders of the captives in Babylon came to the prophet, Ezekiel, requesting that he gain input from the Lord on their behalf, Ez. 20:1.
 - 2. God's response revealed an incredible spiritual stubbornness and rebellion in these elders, Ez. 20:2-4a:
 - a. God asked if these elders were coming to inquire of Him, the "you" being in the emphatic position in the Hebrew text, Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 839. In other words, God is saying, "Are **you** (of all people) inquiring of **Me**?!" (Ez. 20:3a,b)
 - b. To reveal why God asked the question in this way, we look at the Lord's response to His own question: "As I (myself) live, (I will cease to exist) if I will answer your request for input from Me!" (*chi-ani im-idaresh lachem...*) Apparently, God knew that these men were so evil that they would distort God's input or were attempting to manipulate God by their request! (Ez. 20:3c)
 - c. God expressed deep anger with these elders, stating in a question form in a way that is like a command: "**Won't** you **judge** them, son of man? **Won't** you **judge** them?!" (4a) (Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 1263-1264)
 - 3. It is clear that God's patience with these men had evaporated, revealing how callused they were!
- B. God next laid out the route these elders were to take if they wanted true insight, Ez. 20:4b-32:
 - 1. God told Ezekiel to review the history of the nation to date to "figure out" God's will for them, v. 4b.
 - 2. That history explains the need for true repentance from these elders and all of the people in captivity:
 - a. God traced through Ezekiel His selection of Israel as a nation when they were in Egyptian bondage: He promised the nation rich divine blessings were they to cast away their idols, 20:5-7. The nation did not accomplish this obedience, and God graciously salvaged the nation only to protect His own reputation before onlooking Gentiles of fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant, 20:8-9.
 - b. God then delivered the people from Egypt and gave them His statutes and laws to obey for blessing, Ez. 20:10-12; Yet the nation rebelled, and God did not annihilate the nation to fulfill His covenant with the m, v. 13-14. God destroyed only a generation of the rebels, v. 15-17.
 - c. God tried to work with their children, the second generation, v. 18-20; this generation failed as well, and the Lord again failed to annihilate them to protect His reputation before the Gentiles as a God who keeps His covenant with Abraham, v. 21-22.
 - d. God let the people become more and more wicked as a result of their continual rebellion, 23-26a. The purpose was to reveal through their own wickedness that something was wrong with what they were doing, and this way perhaps jar them into repenting, v. 26b. This didn't work, either, 27-31a.
 - e. For these many reasons of spiritual failure, God wanted the elders before Ezekiel to know that He could not nor would not give them insight they sought until they repented, 20:31b-32.
- C. But, revealing His grace, God promised to fulfill His original covenant and forcibly cause the rebellious to be weeded and pruned until the nation followed the Lord in the coming Great Tribulation, Ez. 20:33-44.

Lesson: God is infinitely powerful, gracious and faithful to His own promises, so that even the most rebellious, stiff-necked of His flock will sometime HAVE to yield to His ways. (1) If we are stubborn as were these elders of Israel in Ezekiel's day, we must fear discipline and repent in short order! (2) If we work with difficult people in the discipling effort, take heart. God's flock will have to come around!