

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Ezekiel: Effective Ministry To The Spiritually Rebellious

Part XXIII: Parable Of The Forest Fire: Stressing The Reality Of God's Coming Punishment (Ezekiel 20:45-48)

I. Introduction

- A. God is very aware that we can respond to His Word with a lack of motivation and so overlook His directives and fail to obey Him for blessing.
- B. Accordingly, when He wants to get His people's undivided attention so that they will act, the Lord may resort in prophetic literature to literary devices that jar people.
- C. Ezekiel 20:45-48 is a parable of God's coming judgment on the southern Kingdom of Judah, but it is given in such a way that God intended to jar His people into paying close attention that they respond with repentance.
- D. We view this parable in its context for our insight and application (as follows):

II. Parable Of The Forest Fire: Stressing The Reality Of God's Coming Punishment, Ezekiel 20:45-48 ESV.

- A. Ezekiel 20:45 begins with the verb *hayah* rendered "come into being; become" (Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 841; B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 224-228), indicating that the prophetic Word of God came to Ezekiel in view of the past extensive context of Ezekiel 20:1-44.
- B. In that context, God had responded to the arrival of Israel's elders who had visited Ezekiel's home and sat before him hoping to gain an answer from the Lord to their questions, Ezekiel 20:1.
- C. God had reacted to this event very negatively, refusing to answer these elders, explaining that throughout Israel's long history, beginning with the Exodus, each generation in Israel had disobeyed the Lord regardless of His repeat efforts to bless them in accord with His unconditional Abrahamic Covenant, Ezekiel 20:2-31.
- D. Then, regardless of Israel's intent even in captivity still to go wayward from the Lord, God promised that through the future Great Tribulation Period He will direct Israel to repent that He might fulfill His Abrahamic Covenant in accord with His great faithfulness as God, Ezekiel 20:32-44.
- E. Accordingly, deeply motivated in Himself to deal with Israel's deep-seated rebellion and to fulfill His unconditional covenant given to her forefathers, the Lord gave the Ezekiel 20:45-48 parable, obviously intending to jar His people into taking the necessary action of repentance (as follows):
 1. God directed the prophet Ezekiel to turn his face literally to the "right hand" (*temanah*), the **direction** of the "south." [Directions in the Ancient Near East were based on the assumption one faced "east," so "forward" meant "east," "left hand" meant "north," "behind" meant "west" and "right hand" meant "south," Ezekiel 20:46a; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1266; The MacMillan Bible Atlas, 1968, map 1, p. 11.]
 2. Then, emphasizing the direction again, God told Ezekiel to proclaim his message toward *darom*, a **poetic** term for "south" that is used elsewhere in Scripture, Ezekiel 20:46b; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., O. T.
 3. Again, with a focus on the same southerly direction, God told Ezekiel to prophesy against the forest of the *negev*, the southern part of Judah that was also near Israel's border with Edom, Ezekiel 20:46c; Ibid.
 4. This threefold focus on the south or the southland of Judah reflects the reality that the Babylonian attackers would arrive from the north, and God would send them in a southerly direction to devastate the entire land as far as even its southern border, even the forest of the southern part of Judah, the *negev*. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, ftn. to Ezekiel 20:45-49)
 5. Today, the *negev* is a wilderness, so the "forest" that likely existed there in Ezekiel's era has since died out. (Ibid., B. K. C., O. T.; J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, 1982, V. III, p. 477)
 6. God declared that He would kindle a fire in that forest and cause it to devour every green and dry tree, that its flame would not be quenched, and every face in the Kingdom of Judah from south to north would be scorched by it, Ezekiel 20:47 NIV. This statement alludes to the figurative "fire" of God's judgment by the Babylonian invaders, and the intensity of this judgment would be noted by all onlookers, Ezekiel 20:48.

Lesson: Following His extensive complaint about Israel's prolonged history of disobedience, with poetic intensity, God clarified that He would surely, severely bring Babylon south into Judah and devastate the entire nation due to its great, prolonged sin. The intensity of the description of this judgment and the utter devastation of God's punishment described in it was designed to startle Israel into having her respond by repenting of her sin.

Application: If the Lord repeatedly, long communicates a directive for us (Ezekiel 20:1-44), may we be motivated to respond with obedience to Him lest we suffer His breathtakingly intense discipline (Ezekiel 20:45-48).