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EZEKIEL 20: 1 In the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, some of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.

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A deputation of the elders of Israel, as usual, in their distress, came to request Ezekiel to ask counsel of God, Eze 20:1. In reply to this, God commands the prophet to put them in mind of their rebellion and idolatry: In Egypt, Eze 20:2-9, in the wilderness, vv. 10-27, and in Canaan, Eze 20:28-32. Notwithstanding which the Lord most graciously promises to restore them to their own land, after they should be purged from their dross, Eze 20:33-44. The five last verses of this chapter ought to begin the next, as they are connected with the subject of that chapter, being a prophecy against Jerusalem, which lay to the south of Chaldea, where the prophet then was, and which here and elsewhere is represented under the emblem of a forest doomed to be destroyed by fire, Eze 20:45-49.

Verse 1

In the seventh year - Of the captivity of Jeconiah, (see Eze 8:1), and the seventh of the reign of Zedekiah.

The fifth month, the tenth day - That is, according to Abp. Usher, Monday, August 27, A.M. 3411.

Certain of the elders of Israel - What these came to inquire about is not known. They were doubtless hypocrites and deceivers, from the manner in which God commands the prophet to treat them. It seems to have been such a deputation of elders as those mentioned Eze 8:1; Eze 14:1.

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EZEKIEL 20: 2 the LORD's word came to me, saying,

EZEKIEL 20: 3 Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and tell them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Is it to inquire of me that you have come? As I live, says the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.

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Verse 3

I will not be inquired of by you - I will not hear you. I will have nothing to do with you.

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EZEKIEL 20: 4 Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers;

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Verse 4

Wilt thou judge them - If thou wilt enter into any discussion with them, show them the abomination of their fathers. The whole chapter is a consecutive history of the unfaithfulness ingratitude, rebellion, and idolatry of the Jews, from the earliest times to that day; and vindicates the sentence which God had pronounced against them, and which he was about to execute more fully in delivering them and the city into the hands of the Chaldeans.

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EZEKIEL 20: 5 and tell them, Thus says the Lord GOD: In the day when I chose Israel, and swore to the seed 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;

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Verse 5

I chose Israel - They did not choose me for their God, till I had chosen them to be my people.

I lifted up mine hand - I bound myself in a covenant to them to continue to be their God, if they should be faithful, and continue to be my people. Among the Jews the juror lifted up his right hand to heaven; which explains Psa 144:8 : "Their right hand is a right hand of falsehood." This is a form used in England, Scotland, and Ireland.

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EZEKIEL 20: 6 in that day I swore to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.

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Verse 6

To bring them forth of the land of Egypt - When they had been long in a very disgraceful and oppressive bondage.

A land that I had espied for them - God represents himself as having gone over different countries in order to find a comfortable residence for these people, whom he considered as his children.

Flowing with milk and honey - These were the characteristics of a happy and fruitful country, producing without intense labor all the necessaries and comforts of life. Of the happiest state and happiest place, a fine poet gives the following description: -

Ver erat aeternum, placidique tepentibus auris

Mulcebant Zephyri natos sine semine flores.

Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat:

Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat aristis.

Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant:

Flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.

Ovid's Metam. lib. i., 107.

On flowers unsown soft Zephyr spreads his wing,

And time itself was one eternal spring;

Ensuing years the yellow harvest crowned,

The bearded blade sprang from the untilled ground,

And laden unrenewed the fields were found.

Floods were with milk, and floods with nectar filled,

And honey from the sweating oaks distilled.

In the flourishing state of Judea every mountain was cultivated as well as the valleys. Among the very rocks the vines grew luxuriantly.

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EZEKIEL 20: 7 I said to them, Cast away every man the abominations of his eyes, and don't defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

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Verse 7

Cast ye away - the abominations - Put away all your idols; those incentives to idolatry that ye have looked on with delight.

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EZEKIEL 20: 8 But they rebelled against me, and would not listen to me; they each didn't throw away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said I would pour out my wrath on them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

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Verse 8

They did not - cast away - They continued attached to the idolatry of Egypt; so that, had I consulted my justice only, I should have consumed them even in Egypt itself. This is a circumstance that Moses has not mentioned, namely, their provoking God by their idolatry, after he had sent Moses and Aaron to them in Egypt.

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EZEKIEL 20: 9 But I worked for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among which they were, in whose sight I made myself known to them, in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

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Verse 9

But I wrought for my name's sake - I bare with them and did not punish them, lest the heathen, who had known my promises made to them, might suppose that I had either broken them through some caprice, or was not able to fulfill them.

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EZEKIEL 20: 10 So I caused them to go out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness.

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Verse 10

I caused them to go forth - Though greatly oppressed and degraded, they were not willing to leave their house of bondage. I was obliged to force them away.

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EZEKIEL 20: 11 I gave them my statutes, and showed them my ordinances, which if a man does, he shall live in them.

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Verse 11

I gave them my statutes - I showed them what they should do in order to be safe, comfortable, wise, and happy; and what they should avoid in order to be uninjured in body, mind, and possessions. Had they attended to these things, they should have lived by them. They would have been holy, healthy, and happy.

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EZEKIEL 20: 12 Moreover 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.

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Verse 12

I gave them my Sabbaths - The religious observance of the Sabbath was the first statute or command of God to men. This institution was a sign between God and them, to keep them in remembrance of the creation of the world, of the rest that he designed them in Canaan, and of the eternal inheritance among the saints in light. Of these things the Sabbath was a type and pledge.

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EZEKIEL 20: 13 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they didn't walk in my statutes, and they rejected my ordinances, which if a man keep, he shall live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out my wrath on them in the wilderness, to consume them.

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Verse 13

But the house of Israel rebelled - They acted in the wilderness just as they had done in Egypt; and he spared them there for the same reason. See Eze 20:9.

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EZEKIEL 20: 14 But I worked for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out.

EZEKIEL 20: 15 Moreover 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;

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Verse 15

I lifted up my hand - Their provocations in the wilderness were so great, that I vowed never to bring them into the promised land. I did not consume them, but I disinherited them. See the note on Eze 20:5 (note).

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EZEKIEL 20: 16 because they rejected my ordinances, and didn't walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.

EZEKIEL 20: 17 Nevertheless my eye spared them, and I didn't destroy them, neither did I make a full end of them in the wilderness.

EZEKIEL 20: 18 I said to their children in the wilderness, Don't walk in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols.

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#### Verse 18

But I said unto their children - These I chose in their fathers' stead; and to them I purposed to give the inheritance which their fathers by disobedience lost.

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EZEKIEL 20: 19 I am the LORD your God: walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them;

EZEKIEL 20: 20 and make my Sabbaths holy; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.

EZEKIEL 20: 21 But the children rebelled against me; they didn't walk in my statutes, neither kept my ordinances to do them, which if a man do, he shall live in them; they profaned my Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out my wrath on them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness.

EZEKIEL 20: 22 Nevertheless I withdrew my hand, and worked for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out.

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#### Verse 22

I withdrew mine hand - I had just lifted it up to crush them as in a moment; for they also were idolatrous, and walked in the steps of their fathers.

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EZEKIEL 20: 23 Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the nations, and disperse them through the countries;

EZEKIEL 20: 24 because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes, and had profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols.

EZEKIEL 20: 25 Moreover also I gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they should not live;

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#### Verse 25

I gave them also statutes that were not good - What a foolish noise has been made about this verse by critics, believers and infidels! How is it that God can be said "to give a people statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they could not live?" I answer, in their sense of the words, God never gave any such, at any time, to any people. Let any man produce an example of this kind if he can; or show even the fragment of such a law, sanctioned by the Most High! The simple meaning of this place and all such places is, that when they had rebelled against the Lord, despised his statutes, and polluted his Sabbaths - in effect cast him off, and given themselves wholly to their idols, then he abandoned them, and they abandoned themselves to the customs and ordinances of the heathen. That this is the meaning of the words, requires no proof to them who are the least acquainted with the genius and idioms of the Hebrew language, in which God is a thousand times said to do, what in the course of his providence or justice he only permits to be done.

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EZEKIEL 20: 26 and I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused all that opens the womb to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD.

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#### Verse 26

I polluted them in their own gifts - I permitted them to pollute themselves by the offerings which they made to their idols. Causing their children to pass through the fire was one of those pollutions; but, did God ever give them a statute or judgment of this kind? No. He ever inveighs against such things, and they incur his heaviest displeasure and curse. See on Eze 20:31 (note).

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EZEKIEL 20: 27 Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel, and tell them, Thus says the Lord GOD: In this moreover have your fathers blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me.

EZEKIEL 20: 28 For when I had brought them into the land, which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill, and every thick tree, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there also they made their pleasant aroma, and they poured out there their drink offerings.

EZEKIEL 20: 29 Then I said to them, What does the high place where you go mean? So its name is called Bamah to this day.

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#### Verse 29

What is the high place - מה הבמה mah habbamah, "what is the high place?" What is it good for? Its being a high place shows it to be a place of idolatry. I called it במה bamah, to mark it with infamy; but ye continue to frequent it, even while it is called במה bamah, to the present day!

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EZEKIEL 20: 30 Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Do you pollute yourselves in the way of your fathers? and do you play the prostitute after their abominations?

EZEKIEL 20: 31 and when you offer your gifts, when you make your sons to pass through the fire, do you pollute yourselves with all your idols to this day? and shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you;

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Verse 31

Ye pollute yourselves - This shows the sense in which God says, Eze 20:26, "I polluted them in their own gifts." They chose to pollute themselves, and I permitted them to do so. See on Eze 20:25 (note), Eze 20:26 (note).

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EZEKIEL 20: 32 and that which comes into your mind shall not be at all, in that you say, We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.

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Verse 32

And that which cometh into your mind - Ye wish to be naturalized among idolaters, and make a part of such nations. But this shall not be at all; you shall be preserved as a distinct people. Ye shall not be permitted to mingle yourselves with the people of those countries: even they, idolaters as they are, will despise and reject you. Besides, I will change your place, restore your captivity; yet not in mercy, but in fury poured out; and reserve you for sorer evils, Eze 20:34.

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EZEKIEL 20: 33 As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, will I be king over you:

EZEKIEL 20: 34 and I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out of the countries in which you are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out;

EZEKIEL 20: 35 and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I enter into judgement with you face to face.

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Verse 35

I will bring you into the wilderness of the people - I will bring you out of your captivity, and bring you into your own land which you will find to be a wilderness, the consequence of your crimes.

There will I plead with you - There I will be your king, and rule you with a sovereign rule; and the dispensations of my justice and mercy shall either end you or mend you.

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EZEKIEL 20: 36 Like as I entered into judgement with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I enter into judgement with you, says the Lord GOD.

EZEKIEL 20: 37 I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;

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**Verse 37**

I will cause you to pass under the rod - This alludes to the custom of tithing the sheep. I take it from the rabbins. The sheep were all penned; and the shepherd stood at the door of the fold, where only one sheep could come out at once. He had in his hand a rod dipped in vermillion; and as they came out, he counted one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine; and as the tenth came out, he marked it with the rod, and said, "This is the tenth;" and that was set apart for the Lord.

I wilt bring you into the bond of the covenant - You shall be placed under the same obligations as before, and acknowledge your selves bound; ye shall feel your obligation, and live according to its nature.

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EZEKIEL 20: 38 and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and those who disobey against me; I will bring them out of the land where they live, but they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and you shall know that I am the LORD.

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**Verse 38**

I will purge out from among you the rebels - The incorrigibly wicked I will destroy; those who will not receive him whom I have appointed for this purpose as the Savior of Israel. And I will gather you who believe out of all the countries where you sojourn, and bring you into your own land; but those of you who will not believe - will not receive the Son of David to reign over you, shall never enter into the land of Israel, but die in your dispersions. This is what the contradicting and blaspheming Jews of the present day have to expect. And thus, both of you shall know that he is Jehovah, fulfilling his threatenings against the one, and his promises to the other.

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EZEKIEL 20: 39 As for you, house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go, serve everyone his idols, and hereafter also, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts, and with your idols.

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**Verse 39**

Go ye, serve ye every one his idols - Thus, God gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they could not live, by thus permitting them to take their own way, serve their gods, and follow the maxims and rites of that abominable worship.

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EZEKIEL 20: 40 For in my holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, says the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them, serve me in the land: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first fruits of your offerings, with all your holy things.

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**Verse 40**



For in mine holy mountain - The days shall come in which all true Israelites shall receive Him whom I have sent to be the true sacrifice for the life of the world; and shall bring to Jerusalem - the pure Christian Church, their offerings, which I will there accept, for they will give me thanks for my unspeakable gift.

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EZEKIEL 20: 41 As a pleasant aroma will I accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries in which you have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations.

EZEKIEL 20: 42 You shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country which I swore to give to your fathers.

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Verse 42

And ye shall know - Shall acknowledge that I am Jehovah.

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EZEKIEL 20: 43 There you shall remember your ways, and all your doings, in which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed.

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Verse 43

And there shall ye remember your ways - Ye shall be ashamed of your past conduct, and of your long opposition to the Gospel of your salvation.

These promises may, in a certain limited sense, be applied to the restoration from the Babylonish captivity; but they must have their proper fulfillment when the Jews shall accept Jesus as their Savior, and in consequence be brought back from all their dispersions to their own land.

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EZEKIEL 20: 44 You shall know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, you house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.

EZEKIEL 20: 45 the LORD's word came to me, saying,

EZEKIEL 20: 46 Son of man, set your face toward the south, and preach toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the field in the South;

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Verse 46

Set thy face toward the south - Towards Judea, which lay south from Babylon, or Mesopotamia, where the prophet then dwelt.

The forest of the south field - The city of Jerusalem, as full of inhabitants as the forest is of trees.

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EZEKIEL 20: 47 and tell the forest of the South, Hear the LORD's word: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burnt thereby.

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Verse 47

I will kindle a fire - I will send war, "and it shall devour every green tree," the most eminent and substantial of the inhabitants; and every dry tree, the lowest and meanest also.

The flaming flame shall not be quenched - The fierce ravages of Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans shall not be stopped till the whole land is ruined.

All faces from the south to the north shalt be burned - From the one end of the land to the other there shall be nothing but fear, dismay, terror, and confusion, occasioned by the wide-wasting violence of the Chaldeans. Judea lay in length from north to south.

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EZEKIEL 20: 48 All flesh shall see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.

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Verse 48

All flesh - All the people shall see that this war is a judgment of the Lord.

It shall not be quenched - Till the whole land shall be utterly ruined.

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EZEKIEL 20: 49 Then I said, Ah Lord GOD! they say of me, Isn't he a speaker of parables?

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Verse 49

Ah Lord God - O my God, consider my situation; who will believe what I shall say? They put the evil day far from them.

Doth he not speak parables? - הלא ממשל משלים הוא halo memashshel meshalim hu, "Is not he a maker of parables?" Is it not his custom to deal in enigmas? His figures are not to be understood; we should not trouble ourselves with them. We are not obliged to fathom his meaning; and perhaps after all it does not refer to us, or will not be accomplished in our time, if it even respect the land. Thus they turned aside what might have done them good, and rejected the counsel of God against themselves.

By dividing the word with our neighbor we often lose the benefit both of threatenings and promises. They voluntarily shut their own eyes; and then God, in judgment, sealed them up in darkness.