EZEKIEL 20

For My Name's Sake: Rebellion, Mercy, the Rod

> *“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.*
> EZEKIEL 20:44

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Chapter 20 breaks the run of undated oracles with a precise date: “in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month” (v1) of Jehoiachin's exile — about August 591 BC, some two years…

2. Chapter 14 already exposed men who set up idols in their hearts and then came to the prophet for a word (14:3).

The Elders Refused

Men with idols in their hearts ask for a word — God will not be inquired of

EZEKIEL 20:1

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.

WHAT IT MEANS

This is the third time elders sit before Ezekiel (8:1; 14:1). God's answer is blunt: "As I live," He will not be inquired of by them (v3).

dārash (דָּרַשׁ)
DARASH · "INQUIRE"

To seek, to consult, to inquire of. The elders came "to inquire of the LORD" (v1) — the proper word for seeking God's guidance through a prophet.

Rebellion in Egypt and the Wilderness

God chose them, swore to them, gave them life-giving law — and spared them for His name's sake

EZEKIEL 20:5

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,

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik ties God's oath in Egypt — His lifted hand in vv5–6 — to the covenant with Abraham.

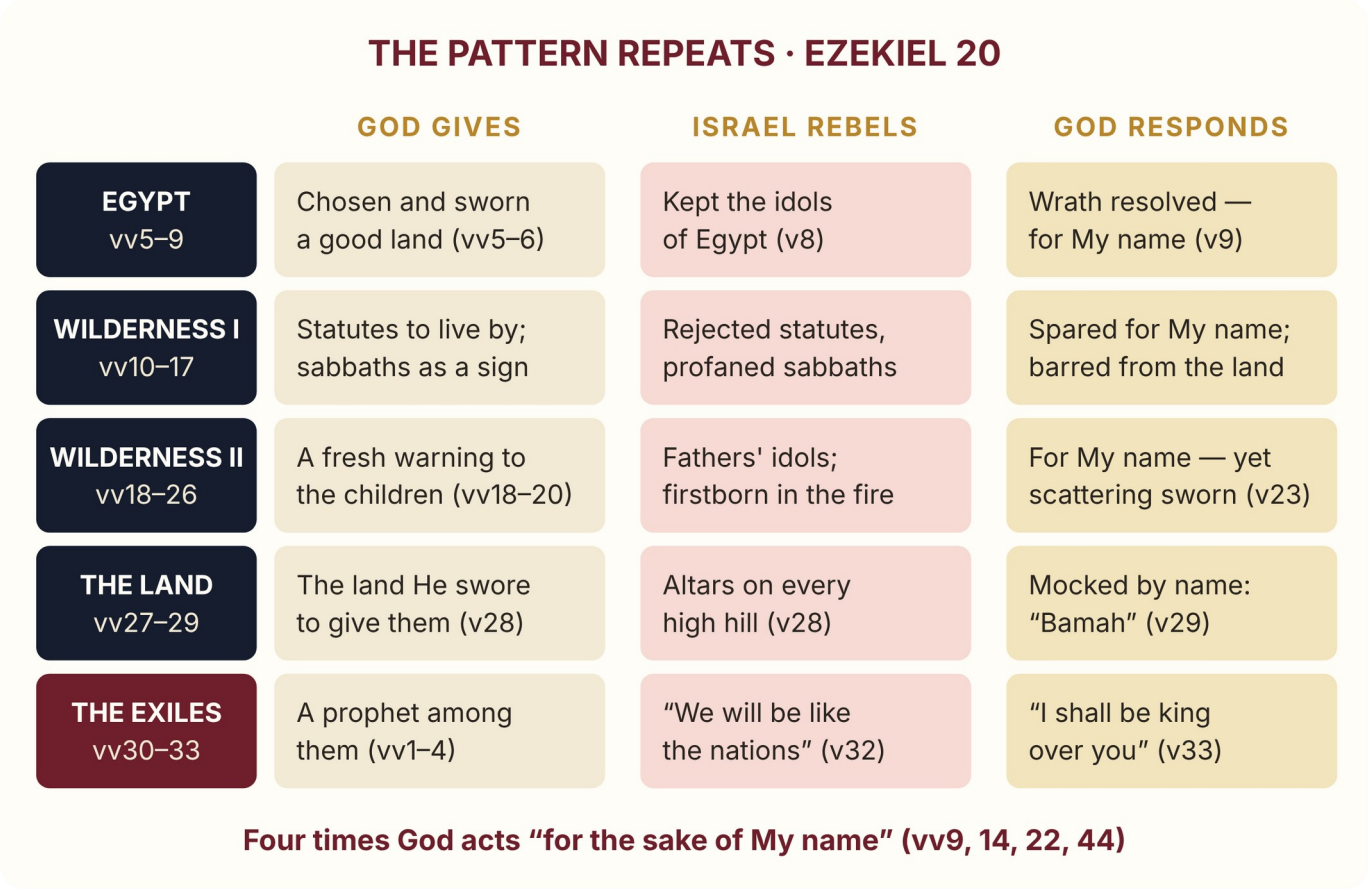
WHAT IT MEANS

God chose Israel and swore to bring them to a land "flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands" (v6). He told them to cast away the idols of Egypt; they refused (vv7–8).

chālal (חָלַל)
CHALAL · "PROFANED"

To pollute, to defile, to treat as common. The word cuts two ways in this chapter.

The Pattern Repeats



Generation after generation the same cycle: God gives, Israel rebels, wrath is deserved — and God acts for His name's sake (vv5–33).

The Children Rebel Too

A second generation repeats the fathers' sins — and God gives them over

EZEKIEL 20:18

"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.

DAVID GUZIK

Verse 25 troubles readers, and Guzik takes it head on. God did not give Israel evil laws at Sinai.

WHAT IT MEANS

God pleaded with the children in the wilderness: don't follow your fathers; "walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances" (v19), and keep My sabbaths as a sign (v20). "But the children rebelled against Me" (v21).

chuqqāh (חֻקָּה)
CHUQQAH · "STATUTES"

A fixed decree, an ordinance. Statutes is one of the chapter's drumbeat words (vv11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25).

High Places and the Plan to Blend In

The fathers worshiped on every hill — and the exiles want to be like the nations

EZEKIEL 20:27

"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.

WHAT IT MEANS

In Canaan the fathers kept going. God had brought them into the land He swore to give them, and they filled its hills with altars (v28).

bāmāh (בָּמָה)

BAMAH · "HIGH PLACE"

A raised place of worship. In the land, Israel saw "every high hill and every leafy tree" (v28) and turned them into altars.

A Second Exodus: Under the Rod

God will be King, sift His people in the wilderness, and accept them on His holy mountain

EZEKIEL 20:33

"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.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik sees in this second exodus 'a partial fulfillment' in the return from Babylon and 'a greater and more perfect fulfillment in the millennial age.'

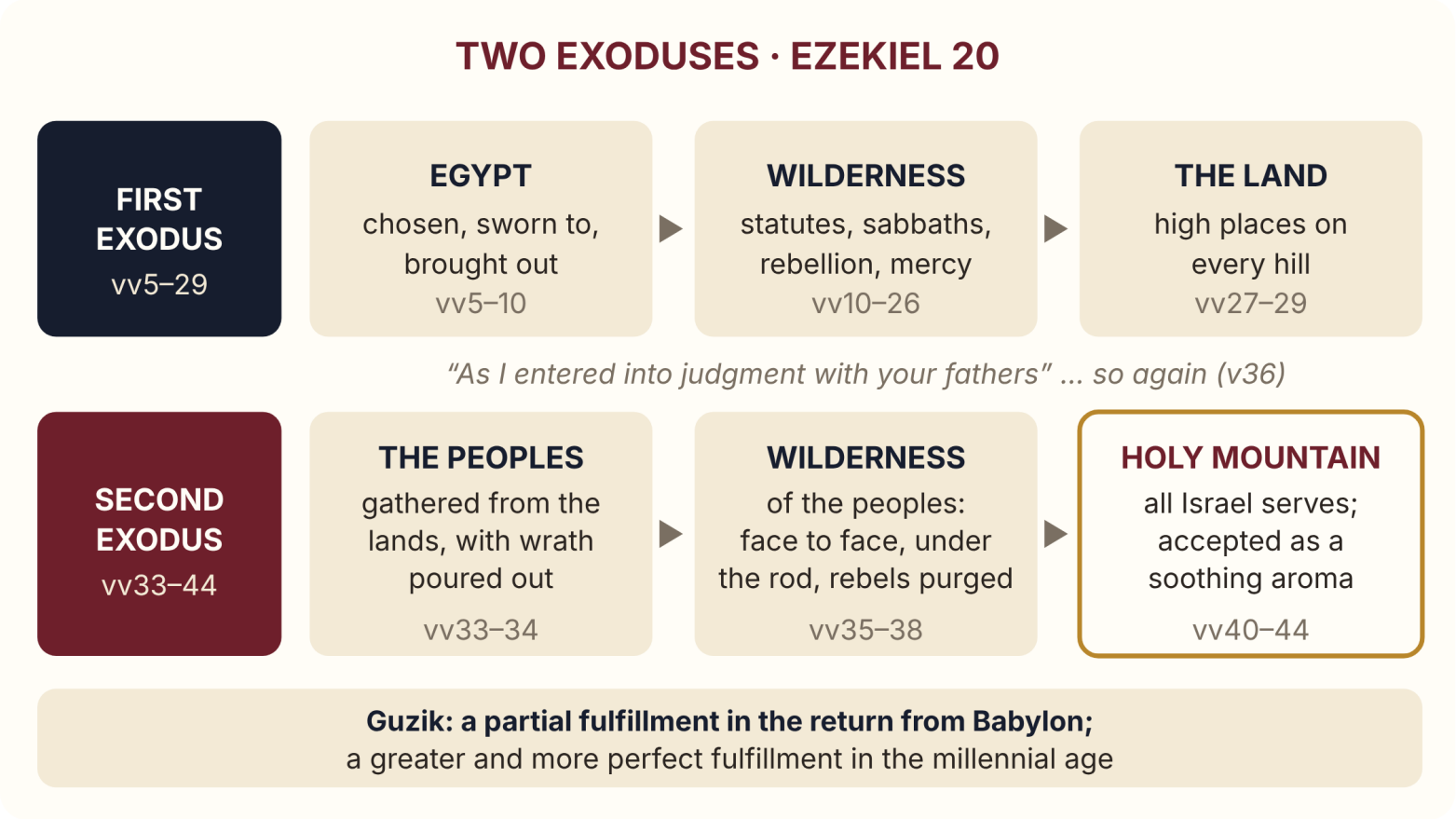
WHAT IT MEANS

"I shall be king over you" (v33) — whether they like it or not.

shēbeṭ (שֵׁבֶט)
SHEBET · "ROD"

A rod, a staff, a scepter. "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (v37).

Two Exoduses



God will do again what He did at the first exodus — gather, judge face to face in a wilderness, and bring His people into the land (vv33–44).

Fire in the Forest of the South

A blaze will take the green tree and the dry — and the people shrug the prophet off

EZEKIEL 20:46

"Son of man, set your face toward Teman, and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev,

DAVID GUZIK

Ezekiel is told to set his face toward Teman and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev (v46). The fire God kindles will consume "every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree" (v47).

WHAT IT MEANS

Ezekiel sets his face toward the south (v46) — toward Judah, which lay south as invaders came from the north. God will kindle a fire that consumes green and dry alike, and "the blazing flame will not be quenched" (v47).

māshāl (מָשָׁל)
MASHAL · "PARABLE"

A proverb, a parable, a byword. The chapter ends with Ezekiel's complaint: "Ah Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not just speaking parables?'" (v49).

What to carry from this chapter

1

God will not be used.

“I will not be inquired of by you” (v3) — the elders wanted a word from God while keeping their idols.

2

Idols started with the eyes.

“Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes” (v7) — the first command God gave in Egypt.

3

His reputation, His people.

Block, in Guzik: ‘The divine reputation depends on the fate and welfare of his people.’

4

Not salvation by works.

Alexander, in Guzik, on “he will live” (v11): ‘It is not a reference to eternal salvation by works.’

More to carry

5

Dung-gods.

gillulim (H1544), Ezekiel's favorite word for idols, may mean ‘dung-gods’ — a word of contempt.

6

Given over.

Guzik, citing Feinberg, reads the “statutes that were not good” (v25) as a judicial sentence, not evil laws from Sinai.

7

Counted one by one.

To “pass under the rod” (v37) pictures a shepherd counting each sheep under his staff (Lev 27:32).

8

Willful deafness.

Guzik on the people who called Ezekiel a teller of parables: ‘Their failure to understand was willful and would be judged.’

Talk it through

1. The elders sat politely before the prophet with idols in their hearts. Where are you asking God for guidance while refusing to deal with what He has already put His finger on?

2. God's first command was, “Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes.” What do your eyes keep going back to that pulls your heart away?

3. Four times God acted “for the sake of My name,” not because Israel deserved it. How does that change the way you think about your own record?

4. “We will be like the nations” was the exiles' secret plan. Where do you feel the slow pull to just blend in?

5. God promises to make His people “pass under the rod.” What would it look like to let the Shepherd examine you one-on-one this week?

CLOSING

Generation after generation Israel rebelled, and generation after generation God held back for His name's sake. He will not be used, and He will not let His people go. He deals with us "not according to your evil ways" — because of His name, and because of His Son.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.