

Ezekiel Chapters 19-20 - John Karmelich

Title "When God Comes Down Hard!"

A tough thing to ponder is, why does it seem like God's coming down hard on us at times? We believe in a God who's perfect and we grasp the idea that none of us are perfect. So why is it necessary when it appears He's coming down hard on us? What's in it for God, and why does He act that way at times? I realize I've got too much time on my hand to contemplate this! Remember His relationship with people is not just about believers! God comes off tough at times as He wants to show non-believers "He's Not to be messed with since He alone is God!" So, at times He wants to make that obvious. Consider when God decided the first born in the land of Egypt must die, multitudes lost their lives and that means a lot of babies died. God's not trying to be cruel! I sleep well at night knowing there's an eternal life for Him to fairly judge all people! Still, He wants to demonstrate to the world He's not to be messed with! Yes I know God allows lots of things simply due to free will! Let me continue:

Given all of that, God does hold believers to a higher standard! As I preach constantly, Christians don't have to fear God showing a movie of our lives to make us relieve all our mistakes when we are judged! At the same time, we're saved for a purpose: To use our lives as a witness for Him. There's a rule that I hold that, "Being a Christian costs us nothing, but the annual dues cost us everything!" Heard that from John MacArthur. The point is God holds Christians to a higher standard. It is not only to encourage us to be a good witness for Him but to remind us how we can suffer if we fail to do so! These chapters are God in effect giving the Israelites a history lesson to remind them of their commitment to Him! They're His witnesses to the world (before Jesus) and "they're stuck with this deal" whether they want it or not! The same applies to giving our lives to Jesus. Bottom line, this is the way life works, we might as well accept it. Use our lives for His glory or suffer the consequences!

With that said, Chapter 19 and 20 spend a lot of time recounting Israel's history through illustrations. It isn't that God needs to hear it! It is to make us realize God knows all things, including our history as an entity (a nation or say the church as a whole). He wants us to realize that our problems are nothing new to Him, so giving us a quick history lesson in effect says, "Think about these things as living as I desire is the best way to live." Will we mess up, of course! Once we grasp what's the best way to live not only for our lives, but also to demonstrate to the world there is God who interferes in our affairs whether we want Him to or not! He not only desires we be a witness for Him, but He wants to show the world that living the Christian life is the best way to live however long it is we get to live!

OK let's talk about Chapter 19. In effect, it's two illustrations. It's for the reader to consider how God's view on how He desires to work in the lives of believers! Of course it's about Israel at that time, but the underlying point is about how God works in our world. He compares the nation of Israel to a lion's cub where the mom is in effect God Himself. The point is the God "raised" the Israelites to be a witness for Him. It talks about their captivity in Egypt and later their captivity in Babylon. The underlying point is they failed to live as He desired despite the power they had as a witness for God and suffered for it. It's important to realize the issue isn't just them or us, but how He is perceived in the world. That's why He allowed their captivity for failing to be a witness for Him. God also promised to leave a remnant as He made unconditional promises about ruling the world from Israel. Still to teach them (and us) to live our lives as a witness for Him has consequences when we fail to do as such.

The second part of the illustration switches from a baby lion to a vineyard. The point is the same. For failing to be a witness for God in effect the vine "dried up and became useless". I assume we all get the

point about using our lives for God by now, so I'll move on to talk about Chapter 20. This chapter has a specific date. In short, it's a short time before the fall of Israel to the Babylonians. Remember Ezekiel's being held captive in that empire (in Iraq today). Some of the Israelite elders also in captivity did ask if God had a message for them! The funny part is God said no, but He spoke for 48 of the 49 verses here in this chapter, so for a god who's got nothing to say to them, He said a lot! God didn't want to say that if the Israelites did "this or that" He'd hold off on the judgment. The point being there IS a too late with God as far as being used by Him as a witness to those around us! A reason God gave Ezekiel this long message is for the reader to understand the consequences of turning from God and what He expects for us to do as a witness for Him!

God (through Ezekiel) starts by giving a history lesson. It's like Chapter 19 in that regards! Both times God is saying in effect here's what I did to separate you from non-believers. Here's how I expected you to act (He gave them His laws!) For Christians, the New Testament is our guide for what laws God still expects us to obey as a witness for Him! To state the obvious, stealing and murder is on the books, not in terms of salvation, but again, it's about being a good witness for Him! The text makes a strong point how God separated the Israelites again, so they'd be His witnesses. The text makes a strong point about the Israelites in the wilderness (after leaving Egypt) couldn't enter the Promised Land (symbolic of the full-rich life of trusting God for guidance) but the next generation did! We also get a few verses about the Sabbath (resting on the 7th day) being a sign for the Israelites.

Time for a quick disclaimer. Despite my few friends who are 7th Day Adventists (Christians who state they should go to church on Saturday, not Sunday), Ezekiel makes it clear the Sabbath concept was for the Jewish nation. To me, setting aside one day a week to worship God or going to a church every day, is a sign of commitment. We're not "more saved" by going more often! The Saturday Sabbath is there to be a "Jewish thing" that the New Testament doesn't require for Christians. Again, I believe in being involved in a healthy church to strengthen us to be a witness to those around us as well as to encourage corporate worship!

In Verse 23, there's something interesting in the middle of the "why they're being punished" speech. It is the fact God said He'd scatter them through the countries! In other words, this prediction given here is much bigger than the Babylonian captivity. It predicts world-wide scattering and implies a gathering a second time (which is what happened in 1948 when Israel became a country again)! This speech here is much more than "you blew it, time to suffer", but includes the God's unconditional promise He made to Abraham (father of the Jewish people) that the land of Israel was given to them! As I preach often, if Jesus will rule the world from Israel, there must be an Israel that believes in Him (future to us)! Bottom line, this long chapter is a mixture of here's what I expect of you, here's how you blew it and despite all that, I'm still going to preserve you as a nation for My (God's) namesake!

What I'm trying to push even more than the fact He expects obedience from us to be a witness for Him! We must grasp that God's also interested in His perception to nonbelievers! That's proof He exists as to show the world He's in charge and not to be messed with! Therefore, the text goes back and forth about how the Israelites must suffer for failing to be a witness for Him mixed with the good news He is going to keep his unconditional promise to that nation!

OK John, we sort of know all this even though we don't think about it very much. Yes, I skipped lots of the historical details because I want the focus to be on how this affects us (believers). We get that we're accountable to Him. We get that the Holy Spirit living inside us is the key to living as He desires. The part we must remember is regularly keeping our focus on Him to live as He desires, being a witness for

Him! That just means bible study, prayer and time with other believers! I realize for most of us that is old news, but those regular reminders is always needed!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on that link on the same page! It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks for reading all this!