Don’t Be So Eager to Forget the Past
Ezekiel 20:1-44

History has a purpose; Paul told the Corinthians why all the miserable wanderings of their forefathers in the wilderness are recorded in Scripture: “But with most of them God was not well pleased for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things become our examples, to the extent that we should not lust after evil as they also lusted” (1 Corinthians 10:5-6).

Philosophy Jorge Santayana said: “Those who do not remember the past are bound to repeat it.” It was German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who said: “Fools say they learn from experience. I prefer to profit by the mistakes of others.”

The Jews in exile could not accept the fact that Jerusalem would fall in spite of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar had already invaded the land twice; first in 605 BC when Daniel and his friends were taken captive, then in 598 BC when Ezekiel and 10,000 others were taken captive; the third invasion is still future as Ezekiel writes our text.

In Ezekiel 20 the prophet gives a review of their history and reminds them what God has done in the past to discipline their forefathers through their slavery in Egypt, through their wilderness wanderings, through their military defeats after possessing the Promised Land; all of this should remind them that God is not above destroying His “holy city” and bringing them into captivity.

The Seeking of a Word from God by the Elders (20:1)

The meeting of the elders with Ezekiel (20:1)... The year was the summer of 591 BC.

The motive of the meeting... This was not their first meeting (8:1; 14:1); these elders had divided loyalties: they wanted to hear good news from Ezekiel; if it is the same old news they had no intention of following it; they wanted Ezekiel to
tell them what they wanted to hear; are we any different? We all want good news and tend to dismiss bad news; it’s like, “I want to live how I want to live, but God I still expect You to bless me!”

*The message to learn from the meeting…* Sincerity is essential to being taught of God; if you want to be led by God you must be sincere in wanting God to be your guide; Jeremiah said, “You shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13); the elders who came to Ezekiel were phonies; their hearts were far from God, but they wanted a good word from God; God warned Ezekiel not to be taken in by these guys; they appear to come in sincerity, but their hearts were far from Me.

*The mockery of God within the Church…* Paul warned Timothy that in his congregation there are those who have a form of godliness, but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5; see Revelation 2:1-4); there are those who outwardly are doing everything right but their heart is not in it; they have the right orthodoxy, but it is a dead orthodoxy; these elders had the right orthodoxy; they knew where to go to hear a word from the Lord, but their heart was not right; they would only accept what they wanted to hear and nothing else.

**The Silence of God (20:2-3)**

*The refusal of God to listen (20:2-3,31)...*There is nothing more fearful than the silence of God; when God is silent judgment is about to fall (Zechariah 2:10).

*The reason for God’s silence…* On two occasions God says, “I will not be inquired of by you” (20:3, 31); silence is a warning that something bad is about to happen; Pilate got the silent treatment from Jesus (John 19:5-9); King Herod got the silent treatment from Jesus (Luke 23:6-10).

*The recognition about the elders for getting the silent treatment….* God knew their hearts that they were hypocrites and He had no intention of being inquired by them; God will not hear the requests of those involved in unrepentant iniquity (Isaiah 59:1-2).

**The Summary of Israel’s Rebellious History (20:5-32)**

The doubting of history by postmodernists... Before we look at our text let me remind you that we live in a generation that has a disrespect for history, or regard it with suspicion; a central plank of postmodern thought is “Doubt history;” French philosopher Foucault wrote: “Historical research cannot escape the values of the historian. They cannot be neutral as they have a disinterested quest for the truth. Such a quest for historical truth arises from a desire to control the past for some purpose.” New Testament scholar E. P. Sanders wrote: “Historical events could not be verified even if we had video recording.”

We are living in a day when truth does not matter; when textbooks are revising history; when “Fake news” has become a well used phrase; however, God’s word is true because it has been inspired and protected by the Holy Spirit; we must accept it as true based on faith as well as the historical evidence that has been discovered.

The danger of rebelling against God... A key word in this historical review is “rebellion” (v8, 13,21).

The discourse of Israel’s history (vvs 5-32).... The history lesson begins with God when He chose Israel and made an oath to the house of Jacob while they were in servitude in Egypt; He said to them, “I am the Lord your God;” He promises to bring them out of Egypt and told them not to defile themselves with the idols of Egypt. He brought them into the wilderness and gave them the law and told them what they must do to live; He gave them the Sabbath as a sign between them that they might know that it is God who sanctifies them; but they profaned the Sabbath and rebelled; God was so angry He was ready to consume them; He choose not to do so for the sake of the Gentiles so He allowed them to wander in the wilderness until the generation that came out of Egypt died off; He gave warning to the second generation not to walk in the ways of their forefathers; but they rebelled too; but He refused to destroy them for His name’s sake (20:9,14,22).

The decision to honor God’s name... We need to honor God for His name’s sake; for His name’s sake He forgives our sins ( 1 John 2 :12); guides us (Psalm 23:3;31:3); deals with us (Psalm 109:21); and receives us (Psalm 143:11).

For His name’s sake we are to serve Him (3 John 7; Revelation 2:3); sacrifice for Him (Matthew 19:29) suffer reproach (Matthew 10:22; 24:9); all that we do should be done to the glory of God’s name (1 Corinthians 10:31).
Once God decided to protect the honor of His name among the Gentiles, He then pronounced Judah as unclean because they caused their firstborn to pass through the fire of Molech; they were going to the high places called “Bamah” (v 29) where pagan altars were located; God simply turns them over to their sins (20:25; see Romans 1:24,26,28); God’s last word to Ezekiel on this matter was to the elders: “As I live, I will not be inquired of by you” (20:31b).

The depravity of human nature... In all this we see the worst of human nature; we see sin’s desire (20:13); we see sin’s deception seen in the second generation of Israelites (20:21); “Only a fool knowingly repeats the failures of others.”

The destructiveness of human nature... Sin has a two way affect on man:

1. Sin toughens the will against God... Israel's history is one of willfulness; a battle of the wills---man’s verses God’s.

2. Sin twists the mind against truth... The firstborn belonged to God, not Molech (Exodus 22:29b;13:2,12,13); false religion is the composite of beliefs supported by Scripture, rather than Scripture supporting one’s beliefs; taken out of context you can justify any action, even suicide.

The delusion of the elders in Babylon... These elders should have known their Jewish history; at the Feast of the Tabernacle the book of the law was read annually (Deuteronomy 29:9-13) ; at Passover the story was told (Exodus 13); Mose told the Israelites to remember the days of old (Deuteronomy 32:7).

The declaration by God of history’s importance... God believed history to be important; Stephen defended his faith to the Sanhedrin by giving them a history lesson (Acts 8); Jude told his readers to contend earnestly for the faith (1:3) and then used historical examples to demonstrate the danger of not doing so (1:5-16).

The Sureness of Israel’s Restoration (20:33-44)

The positiveness of God’s message to Ezekiel (20:33-38)... God will spare Israel from annihilation; He will gather them from the nations where they are scattered; He will make them pass under the rod; God plays the role of the good Shepherd
(see Jeremiah 31: 32-34); the day will come when Jews and Gentiles will be one under the New Covenant made possible by the blood of Christ.

The scene described by Ezekiel is still future; at the end of the Tribulation God will gather the Jews in the land of promise, Israel for judgment and those who put their trust in Him will enter into the Millennium and participate in His Kingdom; those who rebel will be judged for their sins and banished to everlasting punishment (Ezekiel 36:14-38; 37:21-23).

The promise of hope... God says that He will accept Judah and Israel “as a sweet aroma” and He will be hallowed in them before the Gentiles (20:41); God’s wrath on His covenant people is temporary; does this not give us hope? If God can take the sinful Jew who knew not the New Covenant and bring them under the New Covenant even though they once rejected their Messiah and refused to be purified by the blood of His covenant, how much more should we who live under that blood know that our sins are forgiven and that we have been accepted by Him? Our God has poured upon us His sweet aroma and has made us more than acceptable in His sight!

The penitence of regret and the praise of forgiveness (20:43-44)... What a promise! God will never deal with us according to our sins; His grace is greater than our sins; “Where sin abounded grace abounded much more” (Romans 5:20).

Hallelujah! What Christ has done for us is history worth remembering! We need to remember history so we can learn from those who went before us; they were sinners and they were severely judged for their sins; let’s not make the same mistakes and face similar consequences; on the other hand, when it comes to past sins, forget them, don’t wallow in them; move on; because of Christ He has promised to remember your sins no more! That is the best history lesson of all! Amen!