

The Idolatry that Kills Us

The False Loves of Israel Led to Their Demise

Impossible Hope Series – Part 4

Ezekiel 6:1-7; 14:1-8

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“In the Bible there is no more serious charge than that of idolatry.”

Brian Rosner, the Gospel Coalition

Introduction

- **How to get the most from this message** – I’m a broken record telling us that the way to get the most from these sermons is to try to **import yourself into the story** and feel what the people feel and see it the way they did. The Bible is talking about real people in a real time in a real place. Once we **experience** what they were going through we can **discern some principles about how it might look if it happened in us today**. So, let’s start by talking about our modern challenges so that when we look back to the ancient world we will see similar patterns and learn from them more quickly.
- **World, Flesh, Devil – What’s World?** – The Bible tells us that we have **three enemies**: the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. We know flesh is the unredeemed part of us and that the Devil is a personal anti-God being that operates in the spiritual realm. But what is the world? It’s the **Anti-Christian society around us. Sounds nefarious, but the truth is, it’s simply a combination of selfish humanity and evil influence.**¹ But here’s the kicker, **we are part of it**. It would be nice to point to ‘those people’ that are the bad guys, but the reality is that **we are a part of it, feeding into it, praising it, and role modeling it for our children**.
- **In what ways?** – **We live out our cultural core values, standards, and behaviors**. We have allowed **our environment to shape our lives too much**. We operate in and embrace societal standards and core values significantly. **Why** do we do that? Let’s look at the foundational challenges. It boils down to **4 power concepts**: What we want. What Satan wants. What America wants. What God wants.
 - **A.) What we want (inherent selfishness)** – **selfishness** is bred into us at birth. We are born with original sin, which basically means we are **born spiritually broken**. No one has to train a child to be selfish, it’s inherent. A mark of maturity is the ability to live with the awareness that we cannot only meet our needs and we must interact with other people who also have needs. But if we have our way, in any areas that we have control, we will tend toward selfishness.
 - **Why we think we can (pride)** – the only reason that we think we can do our own thing and serve ourselves is either **ignorance** (we don’t know any better) **or pride**. The moment we realize that God is the center of our reality and that it’s all about Him, **any choice other than His will is rebellion** and treason. We would only do that if

¹ Satan started things off badly for mankind (Garden of Eden) and has been manipulating and trying to control the world system ever since. The only reason He is not fully the ‘king of this world’ and only the ‘prince of the power of the air’ is that God has restrained him. Since Jesus came and bound him even more, his influence is hampered significantly by the influence of God’s people (the Church) and the presence of the Holy Spirit actively working worldwide. So, I could simply say this world is a combination of ‘selfishness and demonic influence’ but then people get worked up and start seeing demonic influence in a way that I don’t intend. So, I just called it ‘evil.’

we thought that we could, that **we are a competing authority**. That would have to be driven by Pride.²

- **B.) What Satan wants (disconnect thru rebellion) – Satan has not changed his focus since the Garden of Eden. He wants to separate mankind from God.** Remember, the story, Adam and Eve were clicking with God smoothly and things were fine until a serpent showed up (Satan). He started a conversation about how God was holding things back from Eve, and how she deserved better. He suggested that she break free and focus on herself (**independence and self-focus**). When she did so, she rebelled against God and that's exactly what Satan was going for.
- **No worship for Satan?** – Notice that the **serpent didn't say anything about making a serpent god, or any worship and focus on him**. It was enough for him to simply get Adam and Eve to stop serving and worshiping the Lord. As long as their relationship was broken with God, his agenda was served. Why is that? Why not get something for himself? Why not set up worship for him? Although he does that through a variety of gods/goddesses throughout history (e.g. Baal, pagan mythology, etc.), he knows that **he has power when people selfishly live for themselves**. Additionally, **he is driven** with a heart **to hurt God**. He can't hurt Him directly, so he goes after what God loves most...us. Satan is ultimately self-seeking and since he can't get the throne (he tried that and lost badly) he will be content with winning the smaller battles (our attention, praise, etc.) and hurting God whom He hates.
- **Lucifer's fall** – speaking of Satan and the issue of pride, I find it fascinating that one of the few places that seem to talk about the fall of Lucifer is talked about in the Bible,³ is in the book of Ezekiel.⁴ Regardless who it is about, it talks about how even the best and brightest can fall. How does this happen? Pride and idolatry of self.
 - Eze 28:12–19 - *“You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴ You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. ¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. ¹⁶ In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. ¹⁷ Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. ¹⁸ By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you. ¹⁹ All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”*

² Interestingly enough the Bible is clear that what turned Lucifer into Satan was pride. It's at the heart of all trespassing sin (as opposed to 'miss the mark sin' or not reaching a standard sin types).

³ Some scholars don't agree that this passage – Ezekiel 28:11ff – is talking about Satan at all but simply the city of Tyre. I think it is.

⁴ The others are Isaiah 14:12-15 (cf. Lk 10:18) and Rev 12:4.

- Is 14:12–15 - “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!¹³ You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”
- **Official Satanism** – Have any of you ever studied what the religion of Satanism is in America?⁵ Oddly enough it has little to do with Satan. Satan is a figurehead, a symbol, and a logo. Satanism is based on one premise and one premise alone: **Hedonism**. Self-pleasure at all costs. In other words the core values of Satanism are selfishness and independence.
- **C.) What America wants (Self – to be served)** – **The King of America is SELF.** Therefore the **Queen of America is MONEY** – money serves self. **Princes and Princesses** are things like: **independence, pleasure, and escapism.** You can always follow the chain back up to what’s serving what. These core values will show up in our media, our education, our government, our policies, our fads, and our expenditures.
 - **It’s not just America** – let me be clear that this is not a uniquely American problem, it’s **a human problem.** Each nation, or tribe of people, has their own unique blend of core values that drives their culture. I am simply highlighting what selfishness and pride looks like in our culture which may or may not be reflected the same way in another country.
- **D.) What God wants** – **God wants our undivided loyalty, our love.** He wants a strong and intimate relationship with His people, His creation. He made us so that we would work with Him and through His perfect system. He built us so that He could pour His love and blessings down to us. He never needed us. He created us to bless us. He cannot do that if we are self-focused or rebellious.
 - **Why it’s so important to be God-focused** – to the untrained ear, the idea of God demanding worship and praise is weird. It sounds rather egocentric or even megalomaniacal (say that three times fast). So, what’s the deal with that?⁶ It’s actually rather simple: **God is the source of all good things.** He’s not kind of good or really good, He’s the essence of good and life-giving. That means **anything outside of Him and His nature is bad and destructive.** Since humans desperately need life to survive and crave that which is good, God needs to get us to focus on where that comes from, Him. Additionally, God built us to become what we worship, so the

⁵ This is not only confirmed by modern official Satanic groups but from the founder Anton LaVey who wrote the Satanic Bible. The Satanic Bible premise is self. This does not mean that people who claim Satanist concepts view it this way. Many people are actually into worshiping Satan but they are not official members of either the Church of Satan nor Satanists in the official sense.

⁶ My explanation focuses on the main reason for demanding worship that applies to THIS LESSON. This does not mean that it’s the whole reason. Actually, God demanding worship as Creator is normal and appropriate regardless. We have so bought into independence and the elevation of self that it stings our ears to hear that we need to be worshiping someone/something else. We don’t like being forced to do anything since we value independence and freedom so much. But that’s a Western ideal, not a universal truth. In fact, it’s ignorant.

God tells Ezekiel that when he finally shuts down Israel and restores them, it’s primarily to bring glory back to His name that they tarnished.

Ezekiel 36:16-23 – this is before the restoration passage we will use in part 7.

Ezek 36:20-21- “But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’²¹ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.”

more we worship Him, the more He can flow into us and bless us with good things and life. In other words, **WE DESPERATELY NEED to worship Him and be centered on Him, or we hurt and die.**

We Must PROTECT our Core ALLEGIANCE

- **Recap**
 - **1st week** – Ezekiel sees God in heaven and is stunned and overwhelmed
 - **2nd week** – Ezekiel is told to be God's messenger to the Jewish people to explain why they are being kicked out of their land by Babylon.
 - **3rd week** – We studied how God used Ezekiel as a radical playacting prophet who acted out bizarre situations to make God's point to the Jewish people.
 - **4th week** – we back up 30,000 feet and look at why all of this is happening to the Jewish people at all. What did they do that was so bad that God brought in enemy nations to wipe them out, destroy their holy city, their temple, and deport so many to Babylon?
 - **Lesson for them and for us** – let me reiterate what I said at the beginning of my message. **What was happening to the Jewish people was not unique to them. They suffered from the same human problem that the rest of us suffer from. How God interacted with them was unique and we'll talk about that, but it's not like they were a different quality of human that did extra evil things. It was all about God's expectations on them and their assignment that they violated that made it so bad.** But as we watch God work with them, **we are supposed to examine ourselves** and see if there is any of those same tendencies, behaviors, issues that we deal with too. Let's learn from their mistakes.
 - **Israel-centric message** – Although the book of Ezekiel is heavily weighted on talking to the Jews and about the Jews, it is also loaded with warnings to other nations around Israel. It addresses **10 other people groups covering 9 of the 48 chapters** of Ezekiel. We are not going to talk about their problems and judgment. We are only going to focus on Israel because that is the main point of this book. Those other people groups are important but not as important for our purposes. **I'm skipping that.** They too were being held accountable, but their judgment was not necessarily new themes that we needed to study.
 - **Prophecies against 10 other nations (9 chapters worth)**
 1. Prophecy against the Ammonites (chp. 25:1-8)
 2. Prophecy against Moab (25:8-11)
 3. Prophecy against (Mount) Seir (25:8-11; chp 35) – if they are considered a separate people group, which they may not be. They may be synonymous with Moab sometimes, but they get a separate judgement message in chapter 35.
 4. Prophecy against Edom (25:12-14)
 5. Prophecy against Philistia (25:15-17)
 6. Prophecy against & Lament for Tyre (26-28:19) (* may be used in section on "A View of Heaven")
 7. Prophecy against Sidon (28:20-24)
 8. Prophecy against & Lament for Egypt (29:1-32:32)
 9. Prophecy against Mountains of Israel (36:1-15)
 10. Prophecy against Gog (38:1-39:24)

Lesson

- **What Israel did wrong** – the first part of our puzzle for today is determining **what actions, behaviors, or intentions did Israel do wrong** that led to their judgment and ultimate destruction? Our **second piece** of the puzzle is to **understand why what they did was so serious that it demanded such a vicious response**, when all nations have done the same things. But first let's look at WHAT they did.
 - **Israel's not a victim** - Much of Ezekiel's prophecies are trying to transform the mindset of Israel and how they perceive their relationship to God. They aren't victims here. **They aren't innocent. God didn't violate His side of the marriage/covenant. They did and they are reaping the consequences** of their idolatry and rebellion. When Assyria wiped out the North of Israel in 722 BC, it wasn't an accident. God orchestrated that. Right now, in Ezekiel's lifetime as Babylon is growing increasingly aggressive toward the South of Israel (the only remaining Israel in the land) and will shortly devastate the city, is not an accident. Ezekiel is given an advanced play-by-play of how it's going to go down specifically to demonstrate to the Jews that God is doing it purposefully.
 - **The main issue = Idolatry** - The destruction and exile of Judah (and Israel) was due to their idolatry. **They were being judged for violating their agreement with God that they would serve Him alone.** What began as simple self-centeredness blossomed into full blown blatant and heinously wicked idolatry over the years.
 - **What's idolatry?** – Idolatry is simply the 'worship of false gods'. In other words, it's the devotion, love, and following forces other than the One True God, Yahweh. In the ancient world, which was filled with polytheism, it took the form of **worshipping** another god/goddess, **an ultimately competing god-concept**. It was believing in and adhering to (with worship and devotion) a supernatural figure that would provide provision and protection. Since most cultures of the **ancient world** assumed that the world was fully of supernatural entities, it **wasn't an argument of IF there was a god, but how many and which one or whom did you serve.** Since these supernatural beings (which we know to be false and simply demonically influenced ideas and personalities) were by definition invisible to the human eye, to keep them top of mind, mankind began to **make objects that would remind them of their presence.** These were called **idols**. Thus, the term idolatry became synonymous with not only believing in these other gods and serving them but also worshipping through the statues, effigies, markers, talisman, totems, etc.
 - **Physical idolatry** – the ancient world merged their spiritual idolatry with their physical idolatry in their **statues**. It was more **overt and clear**.
 - **Spiritual idolatry** – spiritual idolatry is harder to discern until you understand how it manifests and then you can't stop seeing it. **Spiritual idolatry is considering anything more important than God and thereby living based on its importance. This means that whatever is most important gets your attention, resources, time, and heart.** If that's not God, then we have an idolatry problem.
 - **How did that happen?** – **How did Israel**, a strictly God-centric nation from the beginning, **morph into a nation that considered other things more important than God?** At its most base, it seems that two things happened: **1.) they succumb to their own fleshly impulses** (we are born **selfish** and only the Holy Spirit will help us tame it and turn it); **2.) They had**

allowed the cultures around them to bend them into a selfish people who were rebelliously independent from their God. Other people groups served other gods and that influence eventually wore Israel down and they began to partake in it. Instead of transforming the other cultures, they were morphed into the cultures around them. It was their **compromise** and idolatry that pulled their blessing and led to their demise.

- **It began with compromise (trade off) – Israel had both a tough assignment and an extra blessed existence.** Unfortunately **over the years they began to take the blessings for granted and only focused on what they were missing out on.** This led to a bitter heart and a desire to have what other nations and people groups had around them.⁷ They wanted to be free from obligation (selfishness) and partake in the pleasures that other groups got to do. But because false gods were such a part of the other cultures, to engage with the people and their fun activities, it meant they had to embrace the false gods and the idolatry too.⁸ It was a tradeoff that initially they fought against, but later succumb to, and eventually wholly embraced.
- **It seeped into their hearts – What begins as a temptation and turns to sin, later becomes part of the fabric of your soul.** There are times when God busted individuals for falling to temptation to worship other gods and there were times when the punishment was more severe because they were sinning habitually with idols. But in this case, by this time, **after hundreds of years of denying God’s pursuit and correction, it had become part of the fabric of who they were and how their new hybrid culture ran.** They were fully embracing other gods in rather upsetting, devious, and outright blatantly wicked ways.
- **Listen to how God describes the depth of their idolatry** - Eze 14:1–8⁹ - *““Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. ² And the word of the LORD came to me: ³ “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? ⁴ Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, ⁵ that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols. ⁶ “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. ⁷ For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself. ⁸ And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign*

⁷ Notice that none of the idols they got in trouble for were internally generated. They were all external ideas. That was the case from the beginning. Right after they came out of Egypt in the miraculous exodus, they had the golden calf incident. Where did they get the idea of a golden calf? The Egyptian culture and people. They tried to morph Egyptian religion with theirs (hybrid), to cover all their bases for fresh blessing. We do the same thing today.

Ezek 20:32 – *““What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, ‘Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.”*

⁸ Ezekiel 11:12

⁹ The concept of the depth of Israel’s idolatry is thick in this book and it’s almost impossible to cite them all (it’s certainly not helpful here). But a few of the key passages that hit on the seriousness are: Eze 6:1–7

and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

- **We become what we worship (actions & identity follow worship)** – an amazing guiding principle in life is to look through the lens of the axiom: **We become what we worship.**¹⁰ Another great one is **‘we are led by our loves.’**¹¹ It is similar to the concept that Jesus shared when He said, **‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’** A modern-day analogy would be how a horse’s body follows where the head is turned. When our focus is deeply on something it changes us and directs our attention, motivation, behavior, action. Just like having a poster on your wall as a kid of your hero or your childhood idol (e.g. Michael Jordan for boys, Taylor Swift for girls) kept your attention on thinking about them and how they did what they did, and a desire to become like that, so too do **adults have posters of their idols on their hearts**. I would say it this way, **...Once we revere something, we instinctually try to become that. Once we deeply love something, we are willing to give anything to it. Those are wonderful things if we are looking at God. They are terrible if we are looking at any other.**
- **It Influenced Their Actions** – **when we become something, we act like it.** So when Israel went after other gods, they did the things that those false god cultures did (one nation they compromised with that is highlighted a lot is Egypt – chp 20). It not only changed their minds, but it changed how they acted. What they once would have been horrified by became just a part of what they did. Have you ever seen yourself fall into an emotional pit to where you began to do things that you swore you would never do? That’s a fascinating slide and horrifying.
- **A list of sinful actions God busted Israel for** – although this is not an exhaustive list (other prophets prophesied against Israel as well – it wasn’t just Ezekiel), it’s a significant list.
 - **The degree of their sin**
 - *Eze 5:5–6 – “Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. ⁶ And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes.”*
 - **What Israel was doing wrong** – we will study a sample passage that highlights many of the sins that were triggering this judgment upon them. There are many more (see the list following), but this gives us a gist.
 - *Eze 22:6–12, 26-30*¹² - *“Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. ⁷ Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. ⁸ You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. ⁹ There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst.*

¹⁰ Greg Beale – We Become What We Worship – ““What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or for restoration.”

¹¹ I don’t remember who said that. I’m sure they are really smart.

¹² Cf. Eze 18:5–13

¹⁰ In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity. ¹¹ One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. ¹² In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD... ²⁶ Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. ²⁷ Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. ²⁸ And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken. ²⁹ The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice. ³⁰ And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.'

- **Summary** – instead of going through this passage line by line, lets look at it as a whole so we can understand the piling up of issues. In this passage alone it talks about:
 - Civic leadership being corrupt
 - Religious leadership being corrupt
 - Religious sins
 - Sexual sins
 - Disrespect, corruption, pride, injustice, and the list goes on.
 - **The Key Problem - And these were the ones who were supposed to represent the nature of God to the world.**
- **A more exhaustive list** – here is a listing of all the sins (or at least the vast majority) that I found through the whole book of Ezekiel. It's important to remember that God had multiple prophets speaking into the fall of Israel for a long time. This is **ONLY EZEKIEL'S portion** to talk about. It wasn't limited to this.
- **Bigger concepts**
 - Rebellion/rebellious against God¹³
 - Impudent & stubborn¹⁴
 - Rejected God's rules
 - Pride
 - Committed abominations
 - Gold and silver were the 'stumbling block of their iniquity'
 - They are guilty of 'bloody crimes' and the 'city is full of violence'
 - They are a useless vine – producing nothing – fit only for firewood.

¹³ Ezekiel 2:3 – ““Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me.”

Ezekiel 3:7 – “the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart.”

¹⁴ Ezek 2:4a – “The descendants also are impudent and stubborn:...”

- Acted faithlessly
- Walked in ways worse than Sodom who committed – pride/haughty, excess of food, prosperous ease but didn't help the needy
- Committing injustice
- **Specific actions**
 - **Religious Sins**
 - Profaned God's sanctuary with 'detestable things' (5:11) – like worshiping the sun IN God's temple (8:16)
 - They put something in the temple called 'the image of jealousy' (8:3, 5)
 - Used God's temple for personal pride
 - You sacrificed your children to false gods (16:20-21)
 - eat in worship at 'high places' (pagan shrines) – Ezek 20:28
 - profaned the sabbath
 - Holy things are despised
 - **National sins**
 - Expressed slander and faithlessness – 'they say, 'the LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.' (8:13)
 - You trusted in your beauty and played the whore (16:15). You used the gifts I (God) gave you for sinful things.
 - excess of food, prosperous ease but didn't help the needy
 - defiled their neighbor's wife
 - have sex with a woman during her period (menstrual impurity)
 - oppress people
 - commits 'robbery' (not giving bread to the hungry or clothing to the naked)
 - demanding unfair interest and making profit off the poor (extortion of brothers)
 - violent, shedders of blood
 - mothers and fathers are treated with contempt
 - foreigners/sojourners are extorted
 - fatherless and widow are wrong.
 - Incest – defiling daughter-in-law/sister
 - Eat meat/flesh with blood in it
 - **Leadership is corrupt** – this is the focus of next week's lesson.
 - **General leadership sins:**
 - Leadership devise iniquity and give wicked counsel
 - Taking bribes to shed blood
 - **Shepherds/leaders:**
 - Feeding themselves but not others (selfish)
 - Don't strengthen the weak
 - Don't heal the sick
 - Don't bind up the injured
 - Don't bring back the straying people
 - Don't seek the lost
 - Rule with force and harshness
 - Left them to enemies and 'wild beasts' because you don't care
 - **False Prophets**
 - False Prophets were giving false visions and flattering divinations that came to nothing. They were attaching God's name to lying prophecies.
 - False female prophets wore magic bands and gave false words (disheartening the righteous & encouraging the wicked).

Abnormal Action = Abnormal Judgment

- God was brutal** – There’s a difference between punishment and judgment in my opinion. I think of punishment for a specific situation and judgment toward a people group/individual as a whole. This was judgment. The issues were too many and too deep. **Once we are in judgment, it gets dark fast. God isn’t playing around. He uses language here in Ezekiel about Israel that He rarely uses and does things that He rarely does.** It was very, very serious (we’ll talk about why in a moment). Here are some examples of what God was going to do to Israel in the coming days (primarily through the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians – which happened during Ezekiel’s ministry).

 - Forcing cannibalism** - Eze 5:10 – *“Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds.”*
 - No pity** - Eze 5:11 – *“My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.”*
 - Killing men, women & children** - Eze 9:5b-6a - *“Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. ⁶ Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.”*
 - Humiliation** - Eze 16:39-41 - *“They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. ⁴⁰ They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. ⁴¹ And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women.”*
 - Sample of other judgment elements:** make them a desolation, object of reproach among the other nations; famine, destruction; wild beasts that will kill your children; pestilence & blood will pass through you; bring the sword upon you; be scattered among the nations; terror, silence from heaven; deluge of rain, great hailstones, stormy wind; etc.
- Why it was so serious** – Okay, we can all see that **God had every reason** to destroy them for what they did. God had plenty of evidence and proof to sentence them. **But what ultimately did they do that other nations haven’t?** Aren’t they God’s Chosen People? Don’t they get a pass? Don’t they get to be graded on a curve? Special circumstances? Actually that’s part of their problem, they aren’t like everyone else. **It all makes sense when we learn two principles: 1.) Ancient covenants; 2.) Israel’s uniqueness.**

 - Understanding ancient covenants** – one of the key unique elements of God’s relationship with Israel was that they were in covenant together. What’s a covenant? It’s **a contractual agreement.** Usually it’s two-sided with both parties bringing something to the table and agreeing upon the terms. If either side fails to complete their portion the covenant is considered violated and there are severe penalties.
 - Understanding Israel’s covenant specifically** – All covenants are, in a sense, different and unique. What parties agree to, like in marriage (fidelity at the wedding) may be similar, but each one involves expectations that each party brings to the table. When God set up this relational contract/covenant with Israel, it was unique and therefore **God was expressly and explicitly clear.** No other group had ever had the opportunity to have a contract with God like this. Although there are nuances of the covenant (and multiple covenants: see Noah, Moses & David, etc.) with Abraham, which was spelled out most clearly to Moses, I only want to **focus on 1 aspect: the Blessing and Curse contract.**
 - Abraham’s contract/covenant** – it all started with Abraham (c. 2100 BC). He was a normal guy who was raised in a polytheistic home and likely was a good guy

but didn't know anything about the One true God. **One day God appeared to Him and told him something that would change the world forever.** God said that He had a **plan** that He wanted to carry out through Abraham and His lineage. It would create a **connection between man and God** that the world hadn't seen since the Garden of Eden. God was going to start a relationship with a people group and be among them in a special and close way. He was going to use them to tell the world more about God and how to interact with Him. In return God was going to bless Abraham and his lineage in shocking ways.

- **Blessing & Curse Contract** – Although Abraham was given some crucial basics of the contract between God and Israel, it was much more fleshed out when Moses was leading the nation. God clearly spelled out a system which was based on blessings and curses. God was saying, I will do this, if you do this. If you don't do this, I will do something else and it's not going to be good for you. There was no misunderstanding with Israel. They knew what was required of them to remain in the blessings of God.
- **10 commandment time** – the first mention (that I could find) about the bless/curse concept is when God was handing down the 10 commandments with Israel (to Moses) and explaining to them their new identity as His nation. Moses broke the first 10 so God had them make another copy. **The story starts in Deuteronomy 10.** They were already in trouble for rebellion (shocker...) and **God was setting up their new system.** It started with explaining that they were supposed to be like God and love Him and be loyal to Him alone. The rules and regulations that He put upon them was not just for their best but to show the world His nature. God had already showed them miracles in Egypt and they know He is mighty. Now they must follow and obey Him.
 - **Starts with the Heart** - Dt 10:12–17 - *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?¹⁴ Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords,…”*
 - **God promises them the Promised Land** - Dt 11:8–9 - *“You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land that you are going over to possess,⁹ and that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their offspring, a land flowing with milk and honey.”*
 - **The Blessing and Curse concept** – Dt 11:26–28 - *“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse:²⁷ the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today,²⁸ and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.”*

- **There were very specific warnings and instructions:** From chapters 12-27 God lays out how the nation is going to run.
 - **Remove paganism at all costs** - When you arrive in the Promised Land remove all the people groups there and utterly destroy all of their pagan shrines and practices. **If anyone in Israel tempts you to go after other gods, kill them.**
 - **No intermingling** - Don't marry into or intermingle with those nations
 - **Meat rules** - Don't eat meat with blood in it, drain it first.
 - **Idolatry warning** - Don't get caught up in Idolatry or things are going to go bad quickly.
 - **Kosher set up** – clean and unclean foods laid out.
 - **Tithing system** – giving a portion to the Lord.
 - **Sabbath system** – sabbath not just in the week but the sabbatical year every 7 years.
 - **Passover** – once a year honor the Passover and the miracle God did among you in Egypt.
 - **Feasts** – there are a series of feasts to remember the good things of God.
 - **Justice is demanded** – no injustice is allowed to reign in Israel.
 - **Leadership system** – rules & expectations for priests, judges, kings, Levites.
 - **Prophecy of coming Messiah** – Dt 18:15-22
 - **Cities of refuge**
 - **Legal proceedings**
 - **Warfare laws**
 - **Family honor code**
 - **Sexual laws, codes and regulations**
- **The Bless/Curse specifics** – In **Deuteronomy chapter 28**, God lays out the examples of what a blessing looks like for obedience and a national cursing looks like for disobedience.
 - **If you obey you will be blessed – and it looks like this** (v. 1-14)
 - Dt 28:1–2 - *“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.”*
 - Blessed in the city and in the field
 - Wombs of your women will be blessed
 - The ground will yield harvest for you
 - Your cattle and herds will prosper and increase
 - Your food will go a long way to feed many
 - Blessed when you go in and go out
 - Your enemies will be defeated before you.
 - You will have abundance (full barns)
 - Rain will fall in all appropriate times
 - You will be a wealthy nation that can bless other nations
 - **If you disobey you will be cursed – and it looks like this** – (v. 15-68)
 - Dt 28:15 - *“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.”*

- Cursed in the city and in the field
- Your food production will yield little
- Your women’s wombs will be closed
- The land will not produce
- Your flocks will not increase
- Cursed going in and cursed going out
- V. 20, *“The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.”*
- Pestilence will stick to you, wasting disease, fever, inflammation, fiery heat, drought, blight, mildew, boils, tumors, scabs, itch – and you won’t be healed. God will bring ‘extraordinary afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting.’
- Rain will shut off
- You will be defeated before your enemies and will be humiliated before other nations.
- You will be struck with confusion of mind – madness, blindness, confusion, groping about
- You will be oppressed and robbed continually.
- Your wives will be taken from you, along with your homes and vineyards and your flocks. You will be helpless as your children are taken from you.
- A nation that you’ve never heard of today will destroy you.
- You will serve your enemies, full of hunger and thirst, naked, and lacking everything. You will be enslaved.
- You will be besieged by foreign invaders, and you will be so desperate you will turn to cannibalism of your own family.
- In the end very few of you will be left in the nation. You will be taken out of your land (deported) and scattered (to other nations).
- **The Shocking Truth – when you read through the curses for disobedience it’s like a listing of everything that is happening to Israel during Ezekiel’s watch to a “T”. It was said 750 years before it happened (Moses was c.1350 BC, Ezekiel was c.586 BC). God was very clear, they just weren’t listening.**
- **Old Covenant (National Israel) vs. New Covenant (True Israel, Church) - One of the main reasons why Christians today struggle to understand how God operates is that how He interacted with the Jews of the Old Testament is similar to but different in very key ways to how He deals with His Christian Church today. Jesus brought with Him a NEW COVENANT.** It has a different basis and different expectations. After a message like this today we are very thankful, but too often Christians grab Old Testament passages out of context and start applying them to themselves. We love to grab the blessings and not the curses. But here’s the truth, it’s not that it’s an entirely different situation, it’s just that it’s a different covenant. God is still God and His heart is still the same. We can read some of the Old Testament promises and blessings and discern how God may want to do that with us or for us, but we just need to be careful of grabbing old covenant language, or specific Israelite promises and apply them to modern day Gentile Christians like us.

- **New Covenant basis** – the new covenant is based on Jesus Christ dying for the sins of the world and activating that payment on behalf of His people. This means that there is no curse element, there is only discipline for our good. It doesn't mean that our sin doesn't matter it only means that we are condemned for our sin since it was paid for by Christ on the cross. We are living in perpetual grace in a true family dynamic.
- **God's relational lens** – To make matters more serious, the Bible is clear that God didn't look at this covenant through only strictly legal lenses, but through a relational and marital perspective. God uses a lot of metaphors to explain His unique relationship with Israel but most of them are about family. Unfortunately to explain different elements He uses different family dynamics, and it gets a little weird when you put them together. For example God saw Israel as both His wife and His child, but not in the same sense (thank goodness).
- **Marital aspect** - When it came to loyalty and promises, God used marriage, faithfulness, and fidelity language. In other words, violations by Israel of the covenant were seen as marital (and sexual) unfaithfulness, adultery, and cheating violations (i.e. Chapter 23). It wasn't just a business contract.
 - Eze 6:9 - *"I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols."*
 - **God's Ferocious "Jealousy"** - A main theme of Ezekiel's message on God's behalf is the Hebrew word, qin'a, which many translate jealousy, but that is a poor translation. It is actually an extreme passion of God for those whom He loves. It is stoked when the well-being or relationship is threatened by an outside third party. Like a spouse reacting to their partner's other lover. Since God explained many aspects of His relationship with Israel in marriage metaphor, it makes sense to talk about 'infidelity' as the best description of what Israel had done to Him. God is passionate about His people and expects them to be passionate back with gratefulness and exclusive loyalty, especially considering how He rescued them from bondage to Egypt. His vicious responses come from feeling so deeply.
 - Eze 5:13 – *"Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the LORD—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them."*
 - Eze 16:8–14 - *"When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine. ⁹ Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. ¹⁰ I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. ¹¹ And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. ¹² And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³ Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. ¹⁴ And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD."*

- **Parent/child aspect** - When it came to talk about **provision, protection, and care, the Lord tended to use parent-child language**. The main reason for that is it was not an equal-sided covenant. **God and Israel weren't equals**. It wasn't even close. There was a Creator binding Himself to a created being group. The two parties weren't bringing the same level of benefit to the contract. Israel was not a partner in that sense but **a dependent**. Violations in that sense were seen as **rebellious children** that needed to be **corrected and disciplined** (unlike a spouse).
- **Understanding Israel's special relationship with God and unique identity – God dealt with Israel uniquely because they were unique**. They are unlike any other people group on the planet that has ever existed. All people groups that have ever existed were simply created beings trying to sort things out and connect to their God in some fashion, but not Israel. They were given special circumstances and privileges.
 - **A specifically created people group** – Israel was not just another people group on the planet. They were **specifically formed by God, from one man**, Abraham, for a very specific purpose. Their purpose was unique, and it was **their point for existing**.
 - **Assignment: A worldwide purpose** – when their purpose was to **demonstrate the nature of God and His will**, they don't have the freedom to alter the message. Just like God was so severe on Ezekiel that He be represented to an exacting degree, so too was Israel commanded and demanded to be a **living representation**. It didn't matter what they felt about it, or whether they were the one that agreed to the covenant (everyone after Abraham could complain that they didn't sign up for this), it was a fact. It was their identity and **purpose on the planet**. They don't get to do their own thing. **For them to alter their behavior was to alter the image of God to the world**. That's destroying God's glory and impact, which is unacceptable.
 - **Special circumstances** – from their inception they were given special access to and revelation of God. **They weren't starting from ignorance** like other people groups. That means they had a greater accountability and responsibility. **To whom much is given, much is required**. While the world wondered and tried to sort out vague revelations, God specifically talked to the Jews and interacted with them personally and directly.
 - **Special blessings** – Since God was in their midst (proximity presence) He would bless them in unusual ways. It wasn't just the covenant that we talked about a moment ago (although that was the majority of it), but it was also His presence bringing good things to them that other nations didn't get. They were in a sense spoiled spiritually.

[COMPLETE]
- **A Special passage showing the heart of God – what's happening during Ezekiel's life and ministry, to Israel, is not what God wanted**. He wanted repentance so they could get back to blessing and relationship. **He isn't benefited by judging His people. He gets nothing out of it. It's necessary**. His heart is always restoration where possible.
 - Eze 18:30–32¹⁵ - *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.”*³¹ *Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have*

¹⁵ Cf. Ezekiel 33:10-11

committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."

- *Ezek 18:23 – "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"*

- **How This All Applies to Us Today**

- **Sin & brokenness remains** – although we don't have a judgment and covenant problem today we still have sin issues and brokenness that **distorts our relationship with God and blocks his blessings**.
- **We wrestle with idolatry** – we may not have little statues of false gods on our mantles, but **we are worshiping things other than God**. How much do we allow things to become idols in our lives. An idol is anything that is worshiped. We know what we worship when it directs our behavior, if we love it greater than God, or if it takes His place.
- **The best solution (guard what we love most) - Since we are people of passion and bent by our loves, we must guard what we love and to what degree we love it.**

Conclusion

- **It always goes back to the heart** – what holds priority position in our heart? If it is not God consistently, we need to make some changes.