

Generations of Rebels ... and God's Holy Name

- A**
- 1 **20:1** In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel **came to inquire of the Lord**, and sat before me. ²And **the word of the Lord came to me**: ³“Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says **the Lord God**, Is it to inquire **of me** that you come? As I live, declares **the Lord God**, I will not be inquired of by you. ⁴Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers, ⁵and say to them, **Thus says the Lord God**: On the day when **I chose Israel**, **I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob**, **making myself known to them in the land of Egypt**; I swore to them, saying, **I am the Lord your God**. ⁶On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and
- B**
- “Then **I said I would pour out my wrath** upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.
- C**
- ⁹ But I acted **for the sake of my name**, that **it** should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

honey, the most glorious of all lands. ⁷And I said to them, 'Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.' ⁸But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

2 ¹⁰ So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

¹¹ I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. ¹² Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. ¹³ But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned.

3 ¹⁸ "And I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep

"Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them.

"Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend

¹⁴ But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. ¹⁵ Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, ¹⁶ because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. ¹⁷ Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.

²² But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose

their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹ I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, ²⁰ and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.' ²¹ But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths.

4 ²⁷ "Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: In this also your fathers blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me. ²⁸ For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing aromas, and there they poured out their drink offerings. ²⁹ (I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day.)

my anger against them in the wilderness.

³³ "As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you. ³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. ³⁵ And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶ As I entered into judgment with your fathers in

sight I had brought them out. ²³ Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, ²⁴ because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols. ²⁵ Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, ²⁶ and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the Lord.

³⁹ "As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols.

⁴⁰ "For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord God, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. ⁴¹ As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. ⁴² And

³⁰“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? ³¹When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. 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.’ the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord God. ³⁷I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. ³⁸I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord. you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers. ⁴³And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. ⁴⁴And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with **you for my name’s sake**, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God.”¹

Ezekiel 20:1-44

Four Generations of Evil and the Name of the LORD

In the Bible, God’s Name is never just a label we recite. It is the living revelation of his glory, his presence, and his holiness. But sometimes, it is so alive that Scripture speaks of the Name as if it has its own personal reality.

¹ The weave ends in vs. 44, even though the chapter (in our English Bibles) goes through vs. 49. Curiously, the Masoretic text has a major paragraph marker (a *petucha*, פ) ending the text in vs. 44 and then ch. 21 actually begins in 20:45, which we will see next time is literarily tied to ch. 21 as the Masoretic marker demonstrates.

- We praise the LORD — and we praise *His name* (Ps 113:1).
- We give thanks to the LORD — and to *His name* (Ps 122:4).
- We fear the LORD — and we fear *His name* (Isa 59:19).
- We trust in the LORD — and we trust in *His name* (Isa 50:10).
- We love the LORD — and we love *His name* (Isa 56:6).
- We glorify the LORD — and we glorify *His name* (Isa 24:15).

Normally, we praise, thank, fear, trust, love, and glorify *persons*, not things. So when the Bible treats the Name this way, it is revealing that the Name of the LORD is God's visible, personal expression through the One sent to make his glory known and to guard it from ever being profaned. So who is that visible expression? In the OT, it is the Angel of the LORD. He is the One in whom the Name dwells fully (**Ex 23:21**), the One whose own name is Wonderful (**Jdg 13:18; Isa 9:6**).

Generation after generation of Israelites stood in the presence of this living Name. And they deliberately, willfully, brazenly **rebelled against him**.

While Israel was in Egypt, the **Angel of the LORD** appeared to Moses in a flame of fire within the bush (**Ex 3:2**), and made himself known to him, speaking in the first person: **“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are**

in Egypt... *I have come down to deliver them... to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey*” (7–8). He revealed his name saying, “Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: ‘*I AM has sent me to you*’... ‘*The LORD... has sent me to you*’” (14–15). Yet they rebelled even while still in Egypt and were not willing to listen — “Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses” (6:9), and later Joshua commanded them: “Put away the gods that your fathers served... in Egypt” (Josh 24:14).

In the wilderness, he talked about himself in the third person as the Father’s spokesman, just as Jesus would later talk about himself the same way saying, “Behold, *I am sending an angel before you... my name is in him*” (Ex 23:20–21). Amazingly, Jesus would do this over the topic of forgiving sins (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24), which is the exact same thing said about the Angel in this very passage where is it promised that he would bring them into the Promised Land, “I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for *he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.*”

Thus, we learn that in the wilderness, that same Angel led them out of Egypt and moved with the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night as he delivered them (Ex 13:21; 14:19; cf. Jude 5). As Stephen (“The angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai;” Acts 7:38) and Paul ([“The law] was put in place through angels by an intermediary,” who is Christ; Gal 3:19) both tell us, he would speak the commandments in the first person from the fire on the mountain: “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt... You shall have no other gods before me*” (Ex 20:2–3; cf. Acts 7:38; Gal 3:19). He gave them *his* statutes and made known to them *his* rules, and gave them *his* Sabbaths as a sign: “*You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you... that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you*” (Ex 31:13; cf. 1Co 1:30; Heb 13:12; etc. on sanctification; Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5 on sabbath). Yet they did not walk in his statutes but rejected his rules, making the golden calf and saying, “*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!*” (32:4, 8). They refused to enter the land, saying, “*Why is the LORD bringing us into this land...?*” (Num 14:3), and greatly profaned his Sabbaths by going out to gather manna on the seventh day (Ex 16:27–28).

Moses told their children in the wilderness, “When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent *the Angel* and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border” (Num 20:16 NKJV). He then recounts the *Angel’s* commands afresh to this new generation: “Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers... walk in *my statutes*, and be careful to obey *my rules*, and keep *my Sabbaths* holy... that you may know that *I am the LORD your God*” (Deut 5:12–15; 6:1–2). The Angel of the LORD continued to go before this generation in fire by night and cloud by day (Deut 1:33), and spoke to them *face to face* out of the fire (Deut 5:4). Yet they did not walk in his statutes and were not careful to obey his rules; they profaned his Sabbaths — yoking themselves to Baal of Peor (Num 25:3) and provoking Him with their idols (Deut 32:16–17).

When they finally *entered the land*, the *Angel of the LORD* Himself appeared again at Bochim and confronted them in the first person: “*I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?... Now I say, I will not*

drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you” (Jdg 2:1–3). Still, they continued in idolatry, sacrificing on every high hill and under every green tree — profaning the very Name that had given them the land.

This same Wonderful One — the **Angel who bore the Name** — did not leave them without solemn warnings. He swore in the first person what would happen if they rebelled: “**The LORD will send on you curses... because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God**” (Deut 28:15, 20); “**If you will not listen to me... I will set my face against you... and I will punish you**” (Lev 26:14–18); “**If you act corruptly... I call heaven and earth to witness against you... the LORD will scatter you**” (Deut 4:25–27). He warned that disobedience would bring the sword, famine, pestilence, and exile — the very wrath **He would one day pour out** because they refused to obey the One in whom His name dwelt.

Thus, generation after generation encountered the Angel who bore the Name. They heard Him speak as “I.” They saw His glory in fire and cloud. They received His personal commands and signs — and His solemn oaths of wrath if they rebelled. And still they turned away.

They looked at the living Name and turned away.

And when that same Angel finally took flesh — when the Name became Jesus, “Yahweh saves” — another generation shouted, “Crucify Him!”

But the story ends at the cross, where the Name was vindicated forever, and at the empty tomb, where God incarnate rose with the name above every name — so that one day every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This morning, we are going to meet these generations of rebels. And as we do, we will see ourselves. Because the question for every generation — including ours — is the same: Will we rebel against the One who has revealed the Name? Or will we fall down and worship the Savior who bore it for us?

Ezekiel 20: Context and Structure

Now that we have met these generations of rebels standing face-to-face with the living Name who bore God’s glory in fire and cloud, and turned away again and again, we want to begin to feel the full weight of this story, including the astonishing and unexpected grace that refuses to let it end in destruction. To do that best, we need to see not just *what* the

chapter says, but *how God has shaped it*. Ezekiel 20 is no random retelling of Israel's past. It is a carefully crafted masterpiece, designed to drive one truth deep into our hearts: rebellion is inexcusable, judgment is deserved, and every mercy we receive flows solely for the sake of God's holy name.

Following what we've seen with all the even chapters since Ch. 12, Ezekiel 20 is built as *a three-column weave*. The *first column* traces the stubborn rebellion of four successive generations from *Egypt*, through *two phases in the wilderness*, to *the people in the land*. The *second column* records the righteous wrath that rebellion provokes, is repeatedly threatened, and finally promised to be poured out. The *third column* reveals the shocking reason God withholds that wrath again and again: *for the sake of my name*, that it should not be profaned among the nations who watched the exodus. It contains four rows, each one taking us to a new generation of rebels.

The phrase "*for the sake of my name*" rings out like a heartbeat — five times in all — each time pulling back the sword of judgment that Judah so richly deserved. This repetition is no accident. It is the chapter's drumbeat, reminding us that *God's deepest commitment is to the glory of His own Name*. Structure is theology.

Some scholars also see a beautiful pattern or repeated parallelisms and inverse-parallelisms (chiasms) running through the chapter, a complementary symmetrical structure to the weave that also mirrors the many past rebellions with a future promise of renewal.² The historical sins of Egypt, wilderness, and land are balanced against a coming day when God will gather His people again, purge the rebels, and bring them to His holy mountain — all so that they will finally loathe their sin and know Him truly. At the center of it all stands **the Name**: the reason God restrains wrath yesterday, and the reason He will restore tomorrow.

Now, again, this weave sits right in **the middle of Ezekiel's great judgment section on Judah, chapters 12 to 24** — a massive structure where accusations of false prophecy, idolatry, worthless leadership, and rebellion echo back and forth like a mirror. I've suggested that there is a beautiful symmetry between these chapters, with chapter 18 and God's urgent plea to, **"Turn and live!"** standing at the very center.

But notice what happens next as we recall last time. Chapter 19 is a heartbreaking lament, a funeral dirge for the kings of Judah. But then comes chapter 20, the longest, most

² See the amazing work of anonymous Admin, "[Ezekiel 20:1-44](#)," *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Sept 29, 2015).

exhaustive chapter in the whole section, laying out generation after generation of rebellion. It really is as if as I suggested last time that the whole judgment section of chapters limps along like an ancient Hebrew dirge with its mournful 3-beat / 2-beat rhythm you hear in Lamentations and Ezek 19's (hinted at by the 3 col / 2 col alternation of chapters), heavy (long) step followed by a (short) halting one, evoking sorrow and brokenness. The heavier **three-column chapters (like today, Ezek 20) confront the mind** with God's reasoned case; the shorter two-column chapters pierce the heart with poetic grief and tragic fall.

But right at the center — where the plea for life rings out in chapter 18 — the rhythm seems to stumble. Two massive three-column chapters stand back-to-back: chapter 18's **call to repentance**, and chapter 20's overwhelming evidence that **no one, across every generation, has ever been able to repent on their own**. The dirge doesn't just limp here; it almost stops under its own weight. God pleads, **"Turn and live!"** and then immediately shows us why we can't: the incurable rebellion of the human heart, from Egypt to exile.

Ezek 20 is not an accident of writing. It is divine artistry. The whole section mourns like a funeral procession, but at

the heart it piles on the evidence until we are crushed — left with no excuse, no hope in ourselves. Last time I had to go only to what is hinted at in alluding to Genesis 49's future king for grace. But not this week. If we could have kept going in one sitting, we would have seen in it ch. 20 all by itself.

For this is exactly where the gospel breaks in, **but only in Column C**—for it must tell the disaster in the other two columns. But what we will see is that the One who could have poured out His wrath at any moment, instead, restrained it — again and again — for the sake of His Name. The Angel who stood in their midst, bearing that Name, is the same One who took flesh, bore our rebellion on the cross, and rose to vindicate the Name forever. **That is the God of Ezekiel 20**. That is the Savior who turns rebels into worshippers — not according to our evil ways, but for the glory of His own glorious Name.

The Egypt Generation

We begin, “**In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month**” (**Ezek 20:1a**). In the last date we were given (**8:1**), we were about Sept 18, 592 BC. Now we are around **Aug 14, 591**, so almost a year later. As we've seen

twice before (8:1; 14:1), the elders of the captivity come to Ezekiel in Babylon (20b). It says they came “to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me.” They know that Ezekiel is a prophet in their midst. They know he has a direct line to the Lord. They know that *they* do not. And so they come to ask him if the Lord has any word for them.

And we get the now familiar, “And the Word of the LORD came to me...” (2). Because of the Name theology given throughout this chapter, it becomes most vital to remember that John 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning was *the Word*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word of God, John tells us, is Christ. And so *our* Lord speaks to Ezekiel, “Son of man,” he is called again, hinting at the Word’s own coming incarnation many centuries later.

“Speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live,” declares the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you”’” (3). It seems that the point of this opening is that the elders were trying to use Ezekiel as a kind of sibyl or oracle or fortune-teller that they could just inquire and God must answer his prophet’s request. But that’s not the way of it. God chose Ezekiel; Ezekiel did not choose God. The Word

comes to Ezekiel when *he* wants, not when Ezekiel wants. But ironically, the Word in fact comes at the moment of their inquiry. But what he tells them shatters them to pieces. “You think that you can dare come into my presence and command me to answer you? You’ve got another thing coming.”

We know that their inquiry was full of refusal to humble themselves and repent of the very sins that brought them into captivity in the first place. Even as they sit here as slaves to Babylon, they continue to be idolators, as this very phrase “shall I be inquired of by you” will return in vs. 31 where it is connected to their ongoing idolatry, even after such great humiliation of being forced into Babylon. Human arrogance and pride knows no limits. So the Word says, “Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them?” (4). It is a rhetorical question. You *will* judge them, and here is what you will say.

“Thus says the Lord God: On the day when *I chose Israel, I swore* to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making *myself* known to them in the land of Egypt; *I swore* to them, saying, *I am the Lord your God*” (5). The Word is going to give these elders a history lesson on what he had done for Israel. He speaks first of the generation of Israelites who were, like

these very elders, slaves in another land. In this instance, the generation that was a [slave in Egypt](#).

As for the theology, like God choosing Ezekiel to be his prophet, so God chose Israel, they did not choose him ([Deut 4:38; 7:6-8; 32:7-9](#)). The Father (the Most High) took this people and gave them to the Son of God to be his treasured possession that he might rule over them as their *elohim*-angel. The choosing by the Father is mediated by through the Son. Always.

Part of this choosing was [entering into a covenant with them](#). This is the point of “[I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob](#).” That swearing was a covenant oath that he had also given to Abraham and Isaac, that they would one day become a mighty nation in the land of Canaan. He had told Jacob, “[I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again](#)” ([Gen 46:2-4](#)). Earlier, Jacob had seen the Angel in his vision of the ladder-ziggurat, “[I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring](#)” ([28:13-15](#)). This is the same angel who appeared to the eyes of Abraham as the Word of God and

promised him the same things ([Gen 11-12](#); cf. [Acts 7:2-4](#); [12:1-3](#), [6-7](#); [15:1-6](#); [18:1ff](#); [22:11-15](#); etc.).³

Finally, he made himself known to them in the land of [Egypt](#), swearing that he would bring them out and doing so by making himself known to them as the Lord your God. This refers directly back to [the Burning Bush story](#), where we first see that God appears to Moses as the Angel of the LORD inside the burning bush ([Ex 3:2](#)). He then tells Moses, “[I am the God of your fathers](#)” ([6](#)), and Moses was afraid to look at God. “[I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt ... I have come down to deliver them](#)” ([7-8](#)). “[I AM WHO I AM ... the LORD \(Yahweh\), the God of your fathers](#)” ([14-15](#)).

Back to Ezekiel, the Word says, “[On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands](#)” ([Ezek 20:6](#)). Whereas that initial revelation in Egypt was at the bush, the Lord says it again in [Ex 6:6-8](#) and then makes [a formal oath in the giving of the Ten Commandments](#) ([20:5-6](#)), which Stephen says was put into effect through angels and Paul

³ For a great discussion of this see [Michael S. Heiser](#), *The Unseen Realm: Discovering the Supernatural World of the Bible*, Expanded Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2025), 158–160, etc.

adds by a mediator who is One, meaning Jesus ([Acts 7:38](#); [Gal 3:19](#)). In other words, the Angel again was the mediator of God's covenant to the people, for he was their God. Much earlier, he had “[searched out](#)” a land for them, which is simply a way of reminding them that from this very land of Babylon, God came to Abram in days gone by with a promise to give him a land flowing with milk and honey ([Ex 3:6, 8](#)). This is also hinted at when the Angel in the pillar of cloud and fire “[went before them to search out a place](#)” ([Deut 1:33](#); cf. [Ex 13:21](#); [14:19](#); [23:20](#)).

[Ezek 20:7](#) adds, “[And I said to them, ‘Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.’](#)” This likely has in mind the First (and Second) commandment regarding false gods and idolatry ([Josh 24:14](#) reiterates it).

But [vs. 8](#) tells us, “[But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.](#)” This then is their posture towards the God who so graciously swore to deliver them. But [their rebellion](#) goes all the way back to [Ex 6:9](#) when they “[did not listen to Moses](#)” because of their harsh slavery. Even in [5:20-21](#), the

people blame Moses, showing their early distrust. This then was how they reacted to God's gracious provisions through the Angel to deliver, rescue, and redeem his people. **They stubbornly refused to believe** his human messenger or the angelic messenger and instead chose to cling to the idols they had learned to worship in Egypt. How hard it is for the human heart to give up its idols!

That's the history lesson of this first generation. It establishes the exact same pattern we will see in all of the A column stories. And it immediately takes us to the **B column**, which interestingly in the way the verse breaks have come down to us, always comes as the second half of a verse, rather than as its own new verse. Each time they show **God's wrath**. In this case, "Then I said I would *pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt*" (**Ezek 20:8b**).

Wrath and anger are **passions**. And many good Christians, following our confession, affirm divine impassibility: God, in His essential being, is not subject to involuntary emotions or suffering from outside forces; He remains perfectly blessed and unchanging.

If this is true, then how can we speak of God's wrath without contradiction? The usual answer is “anthropomorphism” where God speaks *as if he has* human emotions so we can understand his holiness and justice. But honestly, that can feel like a dodge to me. It's like saying, “God is angry... just kidding. God pours out wrath... just kidding. Just kidding again.” Like that old SNL character Judy Grimes on SNL created by Kristen Wiig and her nervous, rapid-fire “just kidding, just kidding” until you're out of breath and no one knows what's real or what's just kidding.⁴

But there's a better way, one that takes the text seriously without compromising God's nature. *The wrath is real, but it's expressed through the Angel* of the LORD, the visible Yahweh who bears the Name. Like Jesus in the incarnation who is fully God yet truly angry in the temple, the Angel can experience and express appropriate wrath without the divine essence being changed or subjected to sin.

⁴ She plays the nervous travel correspondent on Weekend Update, speaking in super-fast, run-on sentences, punctuating almost everything with “just kidding” (often repeatedly) because she's extremely anxious on camera. But since she *isn't* just kidding, only nervous, she has to correct her “just kidding” by saying “just kidding,” which itself wasn't a joke, so she says “just kidding” like six times in a row before running out of breath. To me, that's kind of what the anthropomorphism thing is doing. “God has wrath, just kidding. God gets angry, just kidding. But the text says he has wrath, so I'm just kidding about just kidding. Just kidding. Just kidding. Just kidding. Just kidding.” Honestly, I have no idea what it's even really supposed to mean. It's just a psyche-out.

God isn't volatile like Zeus. He responds through His sent One with holy, personal anger against sin. That's wrath we can understand, because it's real wrath, not just-kidding wrath. Yet it is perfectly holy and reflects the unchanging nature of God.

Verse 9 introduces **the chapter's heartbeat** as the C Column beings: "But I acted for the sake of *my name*, that it [or "he"] should not be profaned in the sight of the nations... in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt." Notice the language: the speaker ("I") distinguishes Himself from "my name." Yet we've seen that the Name is the Second Person, the Angel. How can the same Person be both speaker (the Word) and object (the Name)? **Two possibilities**, not mutually exclusive: the "I" is the Father acting for the sake of His Son, the Name; or the Word is speaking on the Father's behalf about Himself in the third person, just as Jesus does when He says, "**that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**" (**Matt 9:6**).

The Pharisees cried, "**Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" They were right, and if they knew their Angel theology, they'd have recognized Jesus claiming exactly what **Exodus 23:21** says of the Angel: "**My name is in him... he**

will not pardon your transgression.” The Angel forgives (or withholds forgiveness) because He is God.

This “for my name’s sake” is **the Third Commandment** in action: “**You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain**” (**Ex 20:7**). Taking the name in vain is **treating it as empty, trivial, and profane**.⁵ Profaning the Name means treating the visible presence of God as ordinary. We see this perfectly in **Hagar’s** encounter: “**She called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are a God of seeing’ [el roi]**” (**Gen 16:13**). The grammar is striking. “Name” is the direct object, as if the Name itself is the Person speaking and receiving the title “El Roi.” The Name is no mere label; it is the living, personal presence of God — the Angel. In Christian terms: the Father acted for the sake of His Son, His Name — that He should not be profaned among the nations when the Angel delivered Israel from Egypt. We bear that Name today even as the Angel bore the Name of God. Let us never treat it as vain.

The First Wilderness Generation

We must continue, but can now go much quicker. **Ezek 20:10** begins our next row and **introduces us to the wilderness generation**. “**So I led them out of the land of Egypt and**

⁵ **Kaiser**, *Exodus*, EBC, 423.

brought them into the wilderness.” As it says in **Num 20:16**, “But when we cried out to the LORD, he heard our voice and sent The Angel [NKJV] and brought us out of Egypt; and behold, we are at Kadesh, a city on the edge of your territory.”

The focus then moves to **more of God’s laws**. “I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live” (11). This comes from **Leviticus 18:5**, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them; I am the LORD.” “Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (**Ezek 20:12**). This comes from **Ex 31:13**, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.’”

The whole thing is saturated with **God’s kindness in saving them and in giving them laws** which will make life go well with them. So how did this new generation react? The same way as the previous: “But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them,

he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned” (Ezek 20:13). This all comes to a head at the bottom of the mountain that Moses is on top of receiving these laws at that very moment, when he created a golden calf and had a “feast” (32:4-5).

Therefore, moving to the B Column, we get God’s same response, “Then I said I would pour out *my wrath* upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them” (13b). Numbers 14:12 says, “I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make you [Moses] a nation greater and mightier than they.” Disinheritance is the language of the Son receiving Israel as his inheritance in Deut 32:9, therefore it must be the Son threatening to disinherit, thereby linking the wrath again not to God’s essence, but to God’s angel.

Again, vs. 14 repeats in our third column. “But I acted for the sake of *my name*, that it [or “he”] should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.” Vs. 15 adds more. “Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands.” This comes from Num 14:23, “They have not believed in me, not one of

them who saw my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers...” And thus **Ezek 20:16** gives the justification, “Because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.”

But **vs. 17** now recalls an unexpected grace, “Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.” **Num 14:11-12**, “Then the LORD said, ‘I have pardoned, according to your [Moses] word.’” Moses the mediator interceded and God chose to pardon rather than destroy. Why would anyone deliberately forget such grace?

The Second Wilderness Generation

Yet, that’s precisely what we see as the next row begins. **Ezek 20:18** introduces us to the next generation—the children of the first generation of wilderness rebels. “And I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols.’” This is deep Pentateuch theology such as in **Deut 12:30-31**, “Beware lest you be ensnared to

follow them ... and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their’ gods?—that I also may do the same.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way.”

Vv. 19-20 basically repeat what we saw in Ex 31:13, “I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.” Why the emphasis on sabbaths? It is because it is through the regular rhythm of weekly and annual sabbaths “that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” It was the covenant sign of the Mosaic covenant that pointed to God’s unique role as the one who sets Israel apart as holy. By keeping it, Israel publicly acknowledges that their holiness and identity come from him alone, not from their own efforts or from the gods of the nations.

Sabbaths were a litmus test for loyalty. Would they rest or would they work? Would they trust or would they refuse to see the power behind the invisible sabbath? You know the answer by now, “But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths” (21a)

Therefore, the very same thing repeats again as we return to the B Column, “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness” (21b). This likely alludes to the Baal of Peor which this generation yoked itself to “and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (Num 25:3). So, Moses commanded the chiefs to hang the rebels in the sun before the LORD that his fierce anger might turn away.

In Ezekiel 20:22–26—the Name column—God introduces a new and darker dimension to His mercy by withholding His hand from total destruction. “But I withheld my hand and acted for *the sake of my name*, that it [or “he”] should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out” (22). But this restraint paradoxically leads to judicial hardening — swearing to scatter Israel among the nations “Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers’ idols” (23-24). This oath comes from Deut 4:25-28, “If you act corruptly ... the LORD will scatter you among the peoples.”

But the mercy grows even darker. “Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they

could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 20:25-26). This reverses the pure grace of v. 17 (where God explicitly “spared them” and “did not make a full end of them in the wilderness”) by transforming mercy into a form of divine judgment that exposes and deepens sin, rather than simply averting it. It comes from Deut 28:15–68 (the curses for disobedience), reframing them as God actively handing Israel over to their own destructive ways as punishment for prior rebellion. Thus, what began as straightforward sparing in v. 17 now becomes a severe mercy — God preserves them for scattering and hardening, ensuring that in this way they “know that I am the LORD,” through the consequences of their sin, setting up the ultimate need for a new heart in the future restoration.

The Generation(s) in the Land

This takes us to the longest row in all three columns (Ezek 20:27-44). The reason at the start has to do with the final “generation.” “For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them” (28a). This refers to the generation that entered and received the land as an inheritance.

However, that generation *includes every other generation* since that original for they have all been the generation that has lived in the land, just like that first one. “Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: In this also your fathers blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me” (27).

We find this first expressed in **Jdg 2:1-2**. Notice the character who acts and what he says, “Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “*I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?*” Again, we have further confirmation that we are dealing with the Angel, the Name, the Son of God.

Jdg 2 continues by saying something that we just read about in the dark mercy, “*So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you*” (3). God is going to leave snares in the form of the pagans in their midst because they did not love him and did not trust him. And it says, “As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people

of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the Lord” (4-5).

So now we return to our passage, “... then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing aromas, and there they poured out their drink offerings.” Deut 12:2 had said, “You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green [leafy] tree.” The Word continues in Ezekiel, “(I said to them, ‘What is the high place to which you go?’ So its name is called Bamah to this day)” (Ezek 20:29). God asks a mocking rhetorical question — “What is this high place you keep running to?” — and the Hebrew word for “high place” is *bamah*, so the answer is literally “bamah!” (a high place). This is **divine sarcasm**: Israel turned the Promised Land into a playground of idolatry on every hill, so God sarcastically names their obsession Bamah (“High Place”) to this day, exposing how absurdly they profaned the very Name that brought them there.

But “to this day” exposes that it wasn’t just that generation. It is every other generation that has been in the land right up to the present generation. “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. 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’” (30-32). Now we see why the elders cannot inquire of the LORD. They actually hate him and prove it through their continued rebellion “to this day.” Suddenly, the history lesson has come to the present moment. They have all been rebels since the very beginning.

The wrath column now asserts itself. “As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you” (33). The arm of God is a military term for the Commander of the Armies of God. This, again, refers to Christ in the OT—the very man whom Joshua met near Jericho

who told him in near identical language to Moses at the Bush to take off his sandals, for the place he is standing on is holy ground (**Ex 3:5; Josh 5:15**).⁶ In other words, God is saying he brought Israel out through the military activity of the Angel.

But now, “I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and *with wrath poured out*. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will *enter into judgment* with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord God. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord” (**Ezek 20:34-38**). We return again to the predictions of the soon coming disaster. God is not going to let them get away with their sin

⁶ The main difference is that in Moses’ story it is sandals (plural). In Joshua, it is singular (though few translations render it that way. Caleb Song, using an old Asian joke puts it well, “Many around the world can relate: if your mother takes off her sandals, she is likely going into a special, clean place. If your mother takes off one of her sandals, she is getting ready for war!” Caleb Song, “The Unveiling: A Supernatural Reading of Song of Solomon,” (unpublished), 69.

forever. He will discipline them so that they will know that he is the Lord.

But then we come to [the final decisive column](#). The column of the Name. “As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; *but my holy name* you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols” (39). He will let them do whatever they want in captivity—those who survive. But he will no longer put up with their profaning the Name of Christ.

But suddenly, an [inbreaking of incredible grace](#) is predicted in a way we have not seen quite this way before. “For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord God, there all the house of Israel, *all of them, shall serve me* in the land. There *I will accept them*, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing aroma *I will accept you*, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations” (40-41). [To what does this refer?](#)

Beale notes [Ezek 20:40–41](#) among the OT texts that picture Zion as the holy mountain of [remnant salvation](#), part of

the rich background John draws on for the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the redeemed (**Rev 14:1**).⁷ Many think that the 144,000 here refer to Jews in a future Great Tribulation, but it is much better to see them as referring to **God's elect in Christ's church in the NT era**. That's what I think is going on in Ezekiel as well. This only typologically refers to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem in Ezra's day, for they were still rebels even after all this. No. Something much greater is in mind, and it begins to find its fulfillment when God reveals his "arm" through the coming of **the Suffering Servant (Isa 53:1ff.)**.

Look at the concluding language, "And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God" (**Ezek 20:42-44**).

⁷ **G. K. Beale**, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 735.

Do you understand what you are looking at here? This is not just a promise for a distant future Israel. This is the gospel breaking into the darkness of human rebellion. The Wonderful Angel, the living Name, has been restraining wrath and promising restoration *for His own name's sake* from the very beginning, for thousands of years. This is all about glorifying the Son so that the Father himself might be glorified.

When the fullness of time came, that same Angel-Word took flesh. The Name became “Jesus” — “Yahweh saves.” He who once appeared in fire to Moses, led Israel through the wilderness, and withheld his hand generation after generation, now stood among us. He manifested the Father’s name to the ones the Father gave him (John 17:6). He prayed, “Father, glorify your name” — and the Father answered from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28).

On the cross, the wrath that every generation deserved — the wrath threatened in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the land was finally poured out. But not on us. On Himself. The Name bore our rebellion, absorbed the anger we provoked, and rose victorious, now exalted with the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9–11).

This is the vital truth for us today. **We are no different** from those generations. We are also rebels by nature, prone to profane the Name we bear as Christians. But faith clings to this, that our salvation, our sanctification, and our obedience—all of it rests not on our record, but on *his Name*. By faith we are united to the One who perfectly obeyed, who kept every Sabbath in heart and deed, who bore the wrath for the Name's sake.

In light of this, and of the rebellion of those who came before, but also the promise here of obedience that will come to the new generations that saw Jesus come in the flesh, **let us live as those who bear his Name worthily**. We do it not to earn grace, but because grace has already been given in perfect measure to each of us to believe. **Let us obey**, not to profane the Name with hypocrisy or idolatry, but to glorify the One who saved us for his own glory. **Faith receives the gift; obedience adorns it**. Church, the generations of rebels have found their end in the Wonderful One who became our Savior. Turn to him today. Trust his Name and live for his glory.

Bibliography

- Admin. "[Ezekiel 20:1-44](#)." *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Sept 29, 2015).
- Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999.
- Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Discovering the Supernatural World of the Bible*, Expanded Edition. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2025.
- Huffman, H. B. "Name." *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 610-12.
- Kaiser Jr., Walter C. "Exodus." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary 2: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*. Ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.
- Song, Caleb. "The Unveiling: A Supernatural Reading of Song of Solomon." (Unpublished).