

# INVERTED PARALLELISM OF EZEKIEL 20:5–17

## Rebellion, Disobedience, Idolatry, and Punishment of the Exodus Generation, and God's Grace

From the day I enter upon the command of the American armies, I date my fall and the ruin of my reputation.  
~ General George Washington ~

Part 1 of 2

**A** <sup>5</sup> and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘On the day when I chose Israel and **swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob** and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I **swore to them**, saying, I am the LORD your God,’ <sup>6</sup> on that day I **swore to them**, to **bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.**”<sup>7</sup>” I said to them, ‘Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.’” <sup>8</sup> But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, **nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.**

Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

< oath (5–6a), conditional promise (6b), command to forsake idols (7), rebellion (8a), idolatry (8b, c), and anger (8d) >

**B** <sup>9</sup> 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 by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

< grace given to defend His holiness, reputation, and glory (9) >

**C** <sup>10</sup> So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

<sup>11</sup> I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live.

< grace given in spite of anger, exodus into the wilderness (10), given Laws (11a) and a conditional promise of life (11b) >

**D** <sup>12</sup> Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

< sabbaths given as a sign of the Mosaic Covenant (12a) and made a holy (unique) nation to God (12b) >

**C'** <sup>13</sup> But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness.

**They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live;**

and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate (*kalah*) them.

< rebellion in the wilderness (13a), laws disobeyed (13b), sabbaths ignored (13 c), anger and intent to annihilate (13d) >

**B'** <sup>14</sup> But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out.

< implied anger with lesser punishment given to defend His holiness, reputation, and glory (14) >

**A'** <sup>15</sup> Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands,<sup>16</sup> because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for **their heart continually went after their idols.**

<sup>17</sup> Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation (*kalah*) in the wilderness.

< oath (15a), promise withdrawn (15a), laws disobeyed (16a), sabbaths ignored (16b), idolatry (16c), grace given (17a) instead of annihilation (17b) >

### Notes

**1. Date:** August 14, 591 B.C. **2. Location:** in Egypt (5–9) and in the wilderness (10–17). **3.** Ezekiel 20:1–44 is a recap of Israel's rebellion and God's grace in Egypt (5–9), in the wilderness (10–26), in the Promised Land (27–29), and in Ezekiel's day (30–32) that ends with a prophecy of Israel becoming a holy nation in the Millennial Kingdom (33–44). **4.** Note the motifs of oath (5–6, 15), promise (6, 15), rebellion (8a, 13a), statutes and ordinances (11; rejected in 13b, 16a–b), sabbaths (12; profaned in 13c, 16c), idolatry (7, 8b–c, 16d), wrath (8d–e, 13d), defending reputation (9, 14), grace (10–12, 17), and punishment (15). These ten motifs are repeated for the second generation in the wilderness (18–26). **5.** The center **D**, the thought the author considers most important, emphasizes a sign of the Mosaic Covenant (sabbaths) and the sanctification (to be made a holy nation, cf. Ex 19:6) of the Exodus Generation (12). “While the individual's sign of participation in the covenant was circumcision, the sign of Israel's corporate participation in the covenant was the keeping of the Sabbath” (*IVP OT Background Commentary*, 706). **6.** The point of turning **C'** introduces their rebellion and punishment in the wilderness (‘But’ in v. 13). **7. A–D** emphasize God's grace, gifts, and blessings in Egypt before the Exodus (6–9) and in the wilderness (10–12) in spite of Israel's rebellion, disobedience, and idolatry, whereas the contrasting **C'–A'** emphasize Israel's rebellion, disobedience, idolatry, and loss of blessing in the wilderness (13–16). **8. Time Frame: A–D** cover the time from God's promises to Israel in Egypt (Ex 6:6–8) to his command to observe the sabbaths (Ex 31:12–17) and **C'–A'** cover the time from the golden calf (Ex 31:18) to their encampment at Wadi Zered (Num 21:12; cf. Deut 2:16). **9.** Verses 6–17 show how gracious God is and how little Israel deserved deliverance from Egypt (cf. Lev 17:7; 18:3–5; Josh 24:14). God was angry with Israel in Egypt (8) but chose to lead them out anyway to protect his name, holiness, and reputation (glory) among the nations (9–10a; cf. 20:22, 44; 36:22–23). “God's name is his identity and reputation” (*NIV Study Bible*). “God's reputation, not Israel's merit, is the basis for forbearance and grace” (*ESV Study Bible*). **Principle:** God may show anger or grace to protect his glory; e.g., the reason given for withholding punishment (20:9, 14, 22) is the same given for restoration (36:22–28). Or he may postpone (אָרַךְ ‘prolong, delay’ or חָסַם ‘restrain’) his anger (Isa 48:9–11). **10. swore**, lit. ‘lifted up My hand’ (6, 15). Making an oath with hand(s) raised toward heaven occurs many times in the Bible (cf. Deut 32:40; Dan 12:7). **11. I gave them My statutes** (11): at Sinai (Ex 19–20; cf. Lev 18:5; Ezk 18:9). **12.** The parallelism ends with grace: instead of annihilating Israel in the wilderness as planned (13c), God chose to spare them (17). Moses pleaded that annihilation will cause other nations to think Israel's God is evil (Ex 32:12) or weak and unable to fulfill his promises (Num 14:15–16). **13.** Grace was given to the undeserving first generation by freeing them from slavery (9–10) and by not annihilating them in the wilderness (13, 17; cf. Ex 32:7–14; Num 14:13–19; Psa 106:19–23); grace was given to the undeserving second generation by leading them into Canaan (21–22). **14. Restoration by Ritual Purification:** “In Ezekiel, the process of restoration for the sake of Yhwh's holiness following deliberate moral violations is depicted as a purification ritual: a period of separation and purgation preceding re-entry into the sanctuary and a resumption of the relationship with Yhwh. Cf. the cleansing language in the process of restoration at 20:38, where Yhwh ‘purges’ (from בָּרַר); 36:25, where the people are sprinkled with water and purified (from טָהַר) of all defilements (טִמְאוֹת); 37:23; and 39:12–16, where the land is cleansed prior to utopian restoration” (J. Stiebert, *Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible*, 132). **15. Shame:** “self-loathing follows restoration” (*ibid.* cf. 16:61–63; 20:43; 36:31). **16.** The next section, the rebellion of the second generation, is also inverted parallelism: **A** (18–20), **B** (21a–e), **C** (21f–g), **C'** (22), **B'** (23–24), **A'** (25–26).