

## When The Misdirected Are Redirected

Harmony M.B.C., December 21, 2008; June 17, 2018

Robert P. Myers

**Ezekiel 20:28** *For* when I had brought them into the land, *for* the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savor, and poured out there their drink offerings.

**Ezekiel 20:29** Then I said unto them, What *is* the high place whereunto ye go? And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day.

**Ezekiel 20:30** Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations?

**Ezekiel 20:31** For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? *As I live*, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.

**Ezekiel 20:35** And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.

**Ezekiel 20:36** Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD.

**Ezekiel 20:37** And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:

**Ezekiel 20:38** And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

**Ezekiel 20:40** For **in mine holy mountain**, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: **there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things.**

**Ezekiel 20:41** I will accept you with your sweet savor, **when I bring you out from the people**, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.

In these verses we find the Lord summarizing how Israel had wandered away from

the intent that He had planned for them in the matter of how they were supposed to serve Him. He then gives Ezekiel a message for the nation. The gist of that message was that they had polluted themselves in their worship practices and because of it, the Lord would not hear them nor respond to them. He further informs them that He intends to purge this kind of behavior out of them through trials and in so doing he will flush out the rebellious and show them for what they are.

In the last part of our reading the Lord then assures the people that He will bring them to a place where they can worship Him and serve Him correctly again.

We want to look at this O.T. event and glean out of it what I believe are some very critical teachings for the Lord's church. We will look at three things to be seen in scripture here:

1. We will consider how the Israelites had become mis-directed in their worship and service. We will also consider object lessons in this for the Lord's congregation today.
2. We will then look at Israel's mis-directed expectations and translate that into possible mis-directed expectations of the Lord's church people.
3. Then last we will consider how God intends to redirect Israel by divine intervention and so bring them to a place of spiritual health again.

## **I. MIS-DIRECTED WORSHIP AND SERVICE**

- ❖ I want to make a statement here before I begin to look at this. The statement is in order for us to immediately translate this first thing into a present day warning: Within the Promised Land of liberty and living under grace there are potential snares.
  - These were the chosen people of God brought by Him into the promised land
    - We as the Lord's people need to realize that snares await on every hand to lead us away from serving and worshiping the Lord in the right way
    - These snares are usually crazy ideas born in our own minds about how things can be done without thinking about how the Lord wants it done.
      - Some believers act like we all often do when we buy a new item at the store which has this message on the box, "Some assembly required." We take the box home, cut it open, pour out all the contents and begin trying to assemble the item using our own savvy...or lack of it, only to realize after a half hour of mistakes we **need to read the**

**instructions!** (read vv. 28-29 again).

- ❖ Let's think a minute about how subtle this drifting away can be...how it can sneak up on us as it did Israel:
  - Looking back at v. 28 - The high hills and thick trees were part of the blessings of God given to His people when He brought them into the land. They were to be enjoyed in a lawful way, but we find them using those scenic areas as a place to worship idols.
  - So, something happened to their perceptions about those blessings: "...then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savor, and poured out there their drink offerings"
    - These people made some human decisions about how to use those blessings; this resulted in a mis-direction concerning the relevance and appropriate use of those blessings to the service and worship of God
    - I want us to notice that when God mentions the things they do up there on those hills in their worship He calls every one of them "**their** sacrifices, **their** offerings, **their** sweet savor, and **their** drink offerings." I think this is significant.
    - God had directed the Israelites to worship Him at the tabernacle (**Lev. Ch.1 through ch.24**); the tabernacle was neglected by them in favor of what **they thought** was a more convenient place and way to worship. This is typical human thinking when the wisdom of God is not the guiding light.
      - When I think about how people are too prone to be misguided by their own way of thinking I think it can be illustrated by something we see every day in our society: Jobless people or people on welfare in U.S. standing in line at a convenience store to buy a lottery ticket
      - Also, pet-mania among people who neglect their own health to make sure their two-dozen cats, ten birds, and dozen dogs are fed and taken care of.
      - Let's translate this into the behavior of people who make carnal decisions about how they are to serve and worship God: we see professing Christians laying out of church to go to some human activity and saying or imagining that as long as they think about God, pray, read their bible from time to time, what they are doing is going to turn out alright.
      - Or people who truly believe they serve God when they refuse to tithe because they are behind in their bills and need the money for that.

God understands, they say...and the truth is, God does understand, but His understanding does not align with what people think He ought to be understanding.

- These things are the same as conducting worship in the wrong place and making offerings to gods which (in their hearts) have preempted the great Jehovah!
- So, Those same high hills and thick trees became symbolic of personal and humanistic reasoning for how and where they would worship and serve God.
- In the same way today, as then, if we become duped by these kinds of snares, our worship and our service can become totally misdirected.
  - We will be like people who are trying to travel through thick woods using a birthday candle for light! We will soon be completely off the right path!
  - Here is one example of this misdirected view of service and worship. It comes straight from a freelance evangelist who has written to our website: This is the spirit of many of today's religionists, and this spirit is catching on:
    - ◆ "Where is God's salvation to be found? In the religious setting of a church sanctuary on any given Sunday? **ABSOLUTELY NOT!** Remember **Psalm 74:12** (For God *is* my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.)? It is now in our day that God is "working salvation in the midst of the earth." It is outside of the churches and congregations that God is saving His elect."
- Within the framework of their own invented way of worshiping and serving, they were making all the right moves, but those moves were in the wrong place, and, as I said, it was all about them and not about God:
  - (v.28) "they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savor, and poured out there their drink offerings".
- Nothing in history has negated correct and acceptable service and worship more than **misdirected sincerity**. To have all the right elements, but have the wrong platform is a recipe for certain failure to satisfy the Lord
  - Folks, there is a specific reason why the Lord gave Moses a clear instruction when he assigned him to oversee the construction of all the items for the tabernacle. He said, (**Exodus 25:40**) And look that thou make *them* **after their pattern**, which was shewed thee in the mount.

- Use example of the ABC (auto) which was an American High Wheeler automobile built by A B Cole in St. Louis, Missouri, USA from 1906 to 1910. Known as the Autobuggy from 1906 to 1908 it was billed as "the cheapest high-grade car in America", Its “platform” was the high wheels which gave the car a lot of clearance for travel on rough roads. As roads improved, Cole could not match the competition and the car failed. All its features were attractive, but it failed because it ceased to satisfy the American public.
- God’s people need more than sincerity to serve and worship the Lord. We must have correctness according to the measurement of the Lord...not according to our own whims and reasoning. Sincerity is a great thing to have when we go before the Lord, but we need to make sure that the direction of that sincerity is accurate.
  - Question for each of us: “When you think about serving the Lord, or worshiping the Lord, what is your platform or foundation for doing so? What is your motivation, and what are your guidelines?”
    - We will want to remember that when Jesus talked about building on a solid foundation in His parable of the two builders in **Matthew 7**, he said that the difference between the two builders was whether or not they heard His sayings “and did them” or “did them not.” We’ll look more closely at that in our last point.

**II. MIS-DIRECTED EXPECTATIONS- vv.30-31** Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations? 31 For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: **and shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.**

- There was a misconception among these Israelites that serving and worshiping under their own rules of compromise, they could call on God and He would pay attention to them.
- The same misconception abounds today among Christians. Many believers today think that they can serve and worship God according to rules that they have set, and God will still respond according to their wishes and requests.
- If we pay close attention to His accusations in vv. 30-31 we notice that He itemizes acts of iniquity. The bible teaches us in Psalms 66:19 that “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”
- So, how would we be regarding iniquity if we are sincerely doing the right

things in our attempted service and worship to Him? By offering them on the high hills amidst the thick trees! That is, by making it all about us, and all about how we feel it should be done, and making it all about serving other things in our lives besides our Lord.

### III. RE-DIRECTED BY DIVINE INTERVENTION

**Ezekiel 20:35** And I will bring you **into the wilderness of the people**, and there will I plead with you face to face.

**Ezekiel 20:36** **Like as** I pleaded with your fathers **in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will** I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. (Explain “plead” Heb. “Shaphat” - implies “to govern.”)

- ❖ The Lord uses the world to discipline His people.
  - (Remember that these teachings of the Lord are about the people of God drifting off from their fundamental teachings and practice of proper worship and service)
  - First, are the people of God today...the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ surrounded all about by a carnal world, by carnal worship organizations, by plainly antagonistic religious fanatics such as jihadi Muslims – by the world, which is pressing in on us and in certain arenas, persecuting us.
    - I also want us to be aware when we think of the state of things in our world today, that in the days of Ezekiel, there were some faithful believers in the Lord...but all the impacts coming upon Israel from the “wilderness of the people” was also impacting the faithful.
      - We have lately read about the damage by the volcano eruption in Hawaii: “The lava flows have severely damaged nearby residential neighborhoods and forced over 2,000 people to evacuate their homes. Many still can't access their properties as ash and lava continue to spread around the island.”
      - We intuitively know that among those 2,000 people there were almost certainly some Christians...but they have become victims to a force that they had no control over and that they were probably not being punished with...they will be alright. God will take care of them. But, nevertheless they have suffered. And so it was in Israel when the Lord began to work on them to redirect them by His interventions.
  - Nothing makes God's people more appreciative of His mercy, love, and grace than to be abused by the world.
- ❖ Now, as we look at v. 27, we see more of what the Lord had in store for Israel to straighten them out about their service and worship: **Ezekiel 20:37** And I

will cause you to **pass under the rod**, and I will bring you **into the bond of the covenant**:

- “Will cause” this is divine intervention that takes the form of intersecting providence.
- “Under the rod” - (Relate the account of Israelite shepherds taking the tithe from among a flock of lambs by marking [rod dipped in vermillion] every tenth one that passes through the door set in the lamb pen – **Lev. Ch. 27**).
  - The Lord will by His providence exact from us the quantity of service and worship due to Him. (Note: The tithe is a duty of the children of promise.)
- “bring you into the bond of the covenant”: The Lord has sworn to each of His children that He will be their King and they shall be His subjects; He will be a Father to them and they will be His children.
  - Jonah can run, but he cannot hide
  - All the disciples can flee when filled with fear, but they cannot stay isolated and separated from their Lord
  - Paul can be shipwrecked on a barbarian island, but he cannot be outside the reach of the Lord’s protecting power
  - John can be cast out of human society and exiled to Patmos, but he will not be left without a Savior to talk to.
- ❖ **Ezekiel 20:38** And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.
  - When the Lord’s redirecting influence is effective, His people are purified as a group
  - The overall effect of God’s actions among His people will **re-orient them on the true place and manner of service and worship**
- ❖ **Ezekiel 20:40** For **in mine holy mountain**, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things.
  - This promise from the Lord begins with “in my holy mountain” – this is an allegory of the correct way of worship and service, and refers to a couple of things:
    - “In mine holy mountain” - this mountain is **symbolic of spirit and truth**
      - the “spirit” part of this mountain is that element of service and worship in which we **submit to the Holy Spirit’s leadership in how we will**

**proceed**; and we abandon personal, intellectual, humanistic views of how we will do it.

- The “truth” part of this mountain is all about **listening to God’s word**
- ❖ We want to close by looking at verse 41 and what it teaches us in allegory:  
**Ezekiel 20:41** I will accept you with your sweet savor, **when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.**
- Can we see that this statement parallels Paul’s on writing in **2Cor. 6:17**  
Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,
- God’s acceptance of us and our service and worship when we exhibit distinctiveness (bring you out)
  - When the influence of the Lord in our lives brings us out from amongst unbelievers in motive, method, thinking and acting.
  - When the influence of the Lord in our lives enables and empowers us to form a stronger union with one another than we have with attachments in this world (gather you out of the countries)
  - When the end result of what unbelievers observe in us is the essence of God in us (sanctified in you before the heathen).