

## **The Doctrine Of Israel (Part Four): God's Indictment**

### **Why God Had to Punish Israel**

**Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 01-Feb-20; Sermon #1527**

As I speak, we are in the midst of the United States Senate's trial of President Donald Trump after his impeachment in the House of Representatives. I have been kind of amazed that the process has come this far. I never expected it to, but the Democrats are eager and quite willing to say or to do just about anything to get rid of Donald Trump, whom they consider an illegitimate president.

To many Americans, especially younger ones, the process has been a little bit confusing and maybe you could call it obtuse. What they do not understand is that, frankly, the authors of the Constitution made it that way on purpose.

How many of you who graduated from high school after about 1970 had to take a government or civics course? A lot of us had to take those as a requirement for graduation. Well, over the years, civics requirements have declined quite a bit. The Center for American Progress, they call themselves an independent nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans (they happen to be progressives, they are liberal), and that is why it surprised me when they said that, "Only nine states and the District of Columbia require one year of US Government or civics. Thirty-one states only require a half year of civics or US Government education, and ten states have no civic requirement."

The slashing of civics or government courses in recent years to concentrate on what they call core subjects has resulted in very poor understanding of American government on the part of younger people. And that is not a very good thing in a nation that was founded on citizen participation and understanding of their republic. What the NAEP Civics Assessment found just a few years ago was that only 25% of US students reached what they call

the proficient standard on civics understanding. The widespread confusion about the impeachment process kind of stems from that. They just do not know what is going on.

Many people, and I saw this all across Facebook, thought that the House's impeachment of President Trump meant that he had been found guilty of the two articles of impeachment against him. Well that is just plain ignorance of plain English. To impeach is to call into question the integrity or validity of a person or practice. In this case, it means to charge the holder of a public office with misconduct.

So, impeaching President Trump is to accuse him or to charge him or to indict (a more legal term there). What happened in the House was that the House acted like a grand jury of sorts, and they assembled evidence and they wanted to ascertain if there is enough evidence to prosecute a trial against the president. That was their only job. Some would say they failed in that responsibility yet brought the charges anyway based on very flimsy evidence. So the House's part in the process was only to bring charges against Trump. That was their job.

It is the Senate's job now to sit as a 100-person jury to decide if the House of Representatives accusations rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors, which is the Constitutional standard, if the evidence supports the charge and if Trump should be convicted and removed from office. No President, even though three have been impeached now, has ever been convicted. And the reason why is mostly because it requires a two-thirds majority of the Senate to say he is guilty and that is a very high bar to clear. Even some of the worst ones could not get enough votes for conviction. They might have been able to if they had an impeached President Nixon, but he resigned before he was even impeached.

Now, the case is presided over by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Roberts, providing the judicial branch a say in the proceedings. So it is not just the House, not just the Senate, but also the Supreme Court gets to have a say in it.

If you know civics, if you have done your half year, your course in government in high school, you will know that these split responsibilities

were baked into the Constitution by very wise men at the founding of our nation. They did this to forestall power grabs and frequent instability. They did not want tin-pot dictators and such, so they made it this way so that one branch could balance the other. Civics classes usually make a big deal about checks and balances of power. They put out that there is an executive branch, a judicial branch, and a legislative branch, and each one has checks on the other one. They have various powers so that not one branch of the government can accrue too much power to itself. Now that, over 200 years that we have gone, has degraded a bit. The executive branch has quite a bit more power than it should. But that is the way they made the government as they set it up in the Constitution.

Civics classes also make a big deal usually about the rule of law, how things have to be done according to the law. Again, each branch of the government has some sort of law about it that can check and balance the power of the other branches.

Also one of the most curious things, it seems to go against human nature, is that the founders baked into our government an agonizingly slow and ponderous process of getting anything done. They did not want changes to be made. They wanted it to be very hard for someone to come up with a proposal for a law and get it all the way through the process until it was signed by the president and executed by other parts of the executive branch. They did not want that. They wanted it to be very hard to make any kind of changes. And of course along came the executive order and that went right out the window.

Now the founders had an extensive education in history and government and law, as well as the Bible, they understood a lot of those things. They were acutely aware of the destructive quality of human nature. So in order to forestall human nature taking the government to a place that it should not go, they thwarted it through constitutional law—these checks and balances and all sorts of other things to make things not work easily. Because they knew that, if not restrained, human beings will find a way to pervert anything.

It does not matter whether it is other people, a nation, a church, a community, even sometimes a simple thing as a homeowner's association, in order to procure an advantage for themselves. They will work every angle to

get what they want. People are always reaching for more power or influence or money, and they will find every loophole, they will work every angle, they will attempt every trick in the book to advance themselves at the expense of others, and even a whole nation. They will do whatever they can to put themselves on top.

The US Constitution *presumes* that human nature will remain selfish and inclined to evil. And as the second law of thermodynamics suggests, things tend to move toward disintegration. So they did whatever they could to put into the Constitution whatever it took to make it hard to change anything.

Of course, I am lauding the founders here for their governmental wisdom. But God knows these things too, and a lot better than they do. When He called Israel out of Egypt and made them a nation, He knew the inclination of their hearts and that their carnality would ultimately destroy them. He knew that they would go the way Americans have gone over the last 200-plus years and they did. As we saw in earlier sermons, He included language in the Old Covenant itself that *expects* them to forsake Him for idols and incur the wrath of the Angel of the Lord, as He is called there, whom they were ordered to obey in everything. And He was right. Of course God is always right.

That is exactly what Israel did. They forsook Him. They did not obey the Angel of the Lord and ultimately they became the most sinful of nations—even worse than Sodom.

Today we will spend most of our time studying God's indictment of Israel and Judah. That is why I led with this introduction on the impeachment because that is essentially what we are going to do. We are going to read in various places God's impeachment of Israel and Judah. What were their crimes? What were their sins? What did they do wrong that made Him react so strongly as He did there with sending the Assyrians against Israel and the Babylonians against Judah?

He did other things as well. It was not just war, but there was famine and disease and ultimately there was exile. As a result of that, Israel and most of Judah forgot who they were. Many people are not aware of this, but when the Assyrians came in and took the Israelites away, they came up to the very

gates of Jerusalem and all the rest of Judah had been already conquered and they were taken away with Israel.

So it was not just the ten tribes of Israel, but the Assyrians came down into Judah and took a great many of the Jews away, and all that was left were the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Those who had made it into the city behind the walls so that they could be defended against the Assyrians. And once God drove the Assyrians away, then they left and went back and inhabited parts of Judah. But the Judahites that were left after the Assyrians left were all basically Jerusalemites and those who lived close to Jerusalem who could scurry there. The rest of the Jews went into captivity to the Assyrians and they too lost their identity. So there is a great many Jews who were among the Israelites when they migrated into northwestern Europe. There was only a small remnant (you see that word a lot in the Old Testament), of Judah that was left after the Syrians had already taken a good many of their cousins away, that the Babylonians came against.

We are going to see that overall they broke the Israelites, broke their covenant with God, and in particular, they dove wholeheartedly into idolatry, broke the Sabbath repeatedly, and foolishly trusted in other nations rather than God. And I do not want this just to be a history lesson. As we go along, please think about how this applies today to our own culture, our own nation. Compare what we see about Israel in the Old Testament with the way we can observe our neighbors in our own neighborhoods, our culture that we see on television and on the Internet, wherever we happen to be. Just kind of filter it through your experiences with the present culture and the attitudes of people today. I think you will learn a lot. You will get some good insight. And then of course evaluate yourself. How much of this culture have you absorbed without really evaluating whether it is good or not.

Let us go to Amos 3, please. I am going to go through a few verses there and then I am going to read a good part of Amos 4. I come here because this stretch of Scripture is as good as any to describe the situation in Israel a few generations before its fall. The book of Amos is usually said to have been written about 762 BC, somewhere around there, which is about 40 years before they actually fell in 722. So a generation, a generation and a half from

the time they were going to fall. So by this time the seeds were already planted of their destruction. This gives us a fairly good starting point to see just what the culture was like.

This section in Amos also stands as a general description of the Israelitish people at any time in its existence. Israelites have not changed a whole lot even though where they live may change. They may have gone and called themselves by some other name, but their general attitude remains the same. It does not matter what part of history you look at them in, they are basically the same people.

**Amos 3:1-2** [Just notice the wording.] Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt. [So He is including Judah in here as well], saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

I am just going to go ahead and read the whole section and then we will come back and look at particular things. Let us go down to verse 10.

**Amos 3:10-11** 'For they do not know to do right,' says the Lord, 'who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.'" Therefore thus says the Lord God, "An adversary shall be all around the land; he shall sap your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered."

Let us drop down now to chapter 4. We are going to read all the way through verse 13.

**Amos 4:1-13** Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring wine, let us drink!" The Lord God has sworn by His holiness: "Behold, the day shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. You will go out through broken walls, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon," says the

Lord. "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, you, children of Israel!" says the Lord God. "Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord.

"I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord. "I blasted you with blight and mildew, when your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord. "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; your young men I killed with a sword, along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord. "I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord. "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth—the Lord God of hosts is His name.

We need to highlight a few important points that we went over in this reading. I know that was lengthy, so you will have to maybe go back and look at the wording a little bit more closely. But this tells us a few things about what was going on in Israel. I could have picked many other places to go to, but I thought this one laid a good foundation for what we need to understand.

The first thing (and I have six points here) is that God's judgment against Israel is so much worse because of their special intimate relationship with

Him. This was what we saw in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3. Israel knew God, or they should have known God and His expectations. To make it worse, they had formally agreed by covenant ratified with blood, to worship and obey Him to the exclusion of all others. So they were tied to Him, they were joined at the hip, as it were. And God was not working with anybody else, just with those people. His eyes were fixed on them.

If they were understanding enough, they would have seen that He loved them and He wanted to do everything for them. There are far more promises of His blessing and the like in the Pentateuch, all the things He wanted to do, than there are curses. But, you know, that was part of the covenant and they agreed to those parts too—the good and the bad. So they should have known better. That is what this comes down to.

Amos 3:1-2 is God shaking His finger at them and saying, "You should have known better, Israel. I did My job in educating you and telling you all the good things and letting you know what was expected of you." But they flagrantly sinned and rebelled against Him and that is why He says, "Oh boy, this is going to be so bad because you were in a privileged position and you failed. You blew it." So in His mind, under His idea of justice and judgment, they deserved severe punishment. And it was only the other side of the coin—God's mercy—that kept them from utter annihilation. If He were really to go on justice alone, they deserved to die, just to be wiped out. But He did not. He stopped short of that and showed mercy instead.

That was the first point, they should have known better.

The second point, we find in chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, God describes them in verse 10 as not knowing to do right, "For they do not know to do right." Now this was the same nation that had the Ten Commandments given to them. This is the same nation whose forebears saw all that going on at Mount Sinai. They heard the rumbling voice of God. They had men like Moses and Joshua, the judges, Samuel and David and a lot of prophets that told them what was good and what was not good. And so God's statement here in Amos 3:10 that they did not know to do right is just flabbergasting. How could that be that of all people on the face of the earth, that they did not know the difference between right and wrong?!



It shows you how far they had fallen, despite all God had done to educate them in His way, to give them His laws and all that, they had so suppressed His instruction and were so saturated with sin, they essentially had no concept of what was right and what was wrong. To put it in a few words, they were *morally warped*. It is an astounding thing to think about. In fact, the sense that is here in Amos 3:10, may be that they were approaching the same depths of immorality that the pre-Flood world reached, that every intent of their heart was only evil continually. That is what it says in Genesis 6:5, and by the way, that is also a sign of the end. Jesus says, "That as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the end time."

That is the second point: that they did not know how to do right. They were morally warped by this time.

Third point, God focuses on the sins of the nation's women in chapter 4, verses 1-3. He does this because it is a sign of how far they had fallen. Usually men are the evil ones in a normal society, but when women, who are to be the backbone of the home and of society, the teachers of the next generation, become as self-indulgent and cruel and sinful as men, the nation is pretty much doomed. When the women go, that is pretty much the end. There is no one to bring them back from the edge. God describes the women of Israel as urging, even pushing, their husbands into oppressing and crushing the poor and needy to feed their own selfish desires. And the image, the metaphor He uses is wine. That is the thing they desired most. For the women, it became all about them and their needs and their desires and their addictions. All they wanted was wine to ease their way through life.

The fourth point (this brings us down to chapter 4, verses 4-5), Israel, despite all this evil that they were showing through their actions, were a religious people. But He shows them in the wording here, that they loved the spectacle of religion, they did not like the truth. To them it was a place to see and to be seen and to kind of flaunt their religiosity before other people. So what they did was they corrupted the religion that God had given them through Moses to satisfy themselves. Look at the wording here. He says, "Come to Bethlehem." "Transgress at Gilgal." "Multiply transgression."

That is one point that we can understand here. Where in the Pentateuch does it tell us that there are supposed to be any kind of religious activities, a

shrine, sanctuaries, and whatnot at Bethel and Gilgal? Remember God had told them they were to go to one place where the ark was. First it was Shiloh, and by the time you get to David, it was Jerusalem. But here they had made places of worship in Bethel and Gilgal and He shows them with this wording that what did they do there? They sinned, they transgressed, and they multiplied transgression.

So what He is saying is that their religious life was full of wickedness and sin because, we can call it syncretism, where they mixed philosophies and religions all together and came up with their own way of doing things. But it was much worse than that. It was insidious, really. Notice the next words He says: "Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days." This could be related to different ways that they were very careful about things or it could mean that they perverted the ways of sacrificing and tithing.

Now this word "days" is very interesting. Probably most of your Bibles have a marginal reference that says that this means years, but it really means days, "Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days." Another way to look at this is that they were going way above and beyond the frequency of these things—to be seen. That is the reason they were doing them. If people could see that you were bringing a sacrifice every day and you were bringing your tithes into the sanctuary every three days, boy, people would think that you are just the most religious person there is. You are holy, you are pious.

This is reinforced with what He says in verse 5, "Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving." That is fine. But notice the next words, "with leaven." Leaven is a symbol of corruption. So their sacrifices of thanksgiving were corrupt.

"Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings." This is a lot like what Jesus talked about the Pharisees doing. That they would go up and down the streets with the trumpet and they would let everybody know how good and righteous they were. And so this is what they were doing. They were declaring every time that they made a freewill offering so that everybody knew that Joe the Israelite had given another freewill offering because he wanted the attention. He wanted people to think of him as a good person.

Then God says, of course, "For this you love, O children of Israel!" They liked the spectacle. They liked using religion for their own advancement so that they would be seen as something good and righteous, like they were following what God wanted them to do. So the sense in verses 4-5 is that the religious rites that they were performing were perverted. They were not what God had asked them to do. They were far more, and on the other hand, far less than what He wanted. They were doing those things frequently, but they did not have the sincerity behind them. So they overkilled their sacrifices and tithes, their thank offerings were corrupted by leaven, they bragged about their freewill offerings.

So they love to make a show of religion and devotion, overdoing it in every way possible. But none of it was sincere, it was laced with sin. That is what He starts off with. "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression." So their religious practice, even though it looked on the outside to be something good, it was actually full of corruption inside.

The fifth point, this is verse 6 all the way down through verse 11, God warned them *repeatedly* with various calamities: Natural disasters and whatnot, famine, drought, blight, locusts, disease, destruction, and war, maybe even some earthquakes. There was actually a very severe earthquake that happened around 762 that some say was over eight on the Richter scale that did a terrible job on Israel and Judah. All these things that God sent them were designed to get their attention and make them look up, and say, "What am I doing wrong?" At least they were designed to point to God's displeasure with them, if nothing else, but none of the punishments got through to them.

They never made the connection between the disasters and their rebellions and sins against God. He says they did not repent. They did not return to a right relationship with Him. It almost seems like they did not make any connection whatsoever. They were just "natural" things. So it shows that the Israelites were spiritually obtuse and imperceptive. They could make no good righteous connection. And the reason why is, from what we have seen just generally, they had hardened themselves against God.

The sixth point, this is verses 12 and 13 of chapter 4, God then has to remind them who they are dealing with. It seems that they had forgotten, maybe the best word is misperceived, God. They did not understand just who He was. He tells them in verse 13 that He is the Almighty Creator God. He is the one that forms mountains, He creates wind. It says He even declares to man what his thought is. He is the Creator of mankind. He makes the morning darkness. How powerful must He be to be able to do that! He treads the high places of the earth. That is, like He is skipping, walking, from one mountain to another. It shows both His power and even His omniscience. He is there with them and He is observing them, and He has to tell them that it is the Lord God of hosts who they are dealing with.

He is the sovereign God of all things. He is no dumb idol. He is great, powerful, and real. And they were about to encounter Him as an enemy. That is what it means. "Prepare to meet your God!" Prepare to encounter your God as the enemy because they forced Him into it. He wanted to be their loving husband, as it were, give them all the good things. But because they had done all this terrible sin, He was forced by the covenant to become their enemy. So, they would learn, if they were smart, that ignoring and rebelling against Him was a grave mistake. And I mean that—grave, because it was fatal for most of them. It is depressing, is not it?

Let us do more depressing things. Let us go to II Kings because this is not a happy sermon necessarily, because I want you to to see God's charges against Israel clearly, boldly, because we are reaching that point in the Israelite nations of *this time*. Maybe we have hit it. I do not know. We are going to read quite a bit here in II Kings 17. We will read verses 5-23. This is the historical overview. Obviously in Kings and Chronicles you get the history of what happened in Israel, both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And the authors here, whoever they were, give reasons for Israel's defeat and their exile, their captivity by the Assyrians. So just again notice the wording and the phrasing,

**II Kings 17:5-23** Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor,

the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them.

So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of

Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.

What an indictment, huh? Just laid out there for all to see very clearly.

Notice how the author phrases His declaration of their sins in verse 7. He says, "Israel sinned against the Lord their God" and at the bottom of that verse, he says "they had feared other gods." What he does is essentially equate sin, the more general term, with idolatry. They are in parallel here. So sinning against the Lord their God, he is talking about mostly their idolatry—that they feared other gods. That was their primary sin, that was the one He was most angry about. They forsook the God who had freed them and blessed them, for other impotent gods, dumb idols. Particularly, they went and served the gods of the Canaanites—the very people that God had thrown out before them because of their wickedness.

Now, worse than this appears in verse 9. It says that they, this is almost hilarious if you want to think about it that way, tried to hide their idolatry and rebellion from God. "Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right." They went about thinking God did not notice, or they did things in the privacy of their own homes that they thought God would never see, or they went into a cave, or they did things, you know, clandestinely, one way or another, thinking that God was like them, could not see through walls, could not tell what they were doing, did not know what they were up to. Just shows you how poor their misconception of God really was.

Why they thought that God would not see them worshipping on their secretly built high places is baffling. Remember Ezekiel said, I believe it is in Ezekiel 8, where the angel was going through the city and they found out that they

were worshipping Tammuz and Ishtar secretly, even in the Temple, but in a room where supposedly God could not see. But He certainly did see. But what it shows that they thought the true God was just another idol like Baal or Ashtoreth. They reduced Him to that, a dumb idol. They thought He was like them, blind like them, immobile like them, weak like them (meaning the idols), so they could sneak around and practice their paganism out of His sight as long as they were not near, let us say the Temple or they were not in the Holy Place, then they thought that they could get away with it because God could not see, He would never know that they were going after foreign gods.

Asaph is a remarkable psalmist. He had some great insights into human nature. He says in Psalm 78:41 that they "limited the Holy One of Israel." They limited Him to what they thought a God was like, like the gods that they saw on a daily or weekly basis in terms of those things being made of wood or stone or metal. And then he also says in Psalm 50:21, speaking for God, "You thought that I was altogether like you." That is even, in many ways, worse. They thought He was just like a normal man, with the same powers of a man, the same feelings of a man. But He is something *other*, something *way* superior. So they never seemed to realize who their God really was. They did not think of Him as the all-powerful, all-knowing, universal Sovereign. I do not know that it even entered their minds. They vastly underestimated their God.

Now, God instructed them. He warned them early and often through His prophets, but to no avail. They never listened to the prophets. They wanted to shut them up and kill them, which they did. They stopped their ears from the truth that the prophets were giving them. And on top of this, it says that they stiffened their necks and refused to believe God. That is perverse. Here this great and awesome God is telling you the right way, follow this path, do these things, think this way. But they would stop their ears and they would run away from Him. They refused to believe Him. That is hard to understand.

Of course, we have had an encounter with God where He is not our enemy, He is our loving Father and He called us out of this world and has given us so much, He has given us His Spirit, so these kind of ideas are somewhat foreign to us. But we do these sorts of things ourselves in other ways. We forget that God is watching. We forget that God is listening or we sneak

around thinking that we are getting away with something, when in all actuality, that is not the case. But they took it to an extreme in rejecting God and doing all these things. They were like spoiled brats who demanded their own way, and refused even the good things, out of spite. This is just how perverse they were.

And he says not only that in their personal relationship with God, they went one step further and they actively sought out alliances. That is, other covenants, treaties, pacts, accords with foreign nations because they wanted to get rich and they wanted to be safe. What were two of the big things that God had told them? "I will bless you and I will protect you." So here God was willing to give them what they really wanted. They wanted great trade, they wanted to be rich, they wanted to prosper. They wanted to be safe while doing all those things and not have to worry about their enemies. All they needed to do was turn to the Lord their God and do what He said.

But no, they could not do that. They rejected God purposefully and made their own side deals with other nations, who had other gods. And this, in God's eyes, the way He looked at it, was adultery, spiritual adultery. Because Jeremiah 3:14 and many other places shows that He considered the covenant with Israel to be a marriage covenant. He was the husband, the nation as a whole was His wife, the individuals were His children. He would do whatever He could to help them and they spurned Him. They would not take His benevolence. They would not take His protection. They wanted to do it themselves or they wanted to do it in alliance with other nations. Would that not be infuriating? Put yourself in God's place.

Verse 16 in II Kings 17 makes a plain but sweeping statement. It says here, "So they left *all* the commandments of the Lord their God." You could say they abandoned His commandments. That is the way the ESV puts it. It was, in our terms today, complete apostasy. It was not just one doctrine or one thing that they refused to do. It was *everything*—the whole kit and caboodle, we might say. There was not one thing that remained with them. They abandoned all of that.

And this abandonment of His commandments led to the horrible sins that are cited next in verse 16: "Made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.



And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger."

It is that last one. We all know how bad idolatry is and child sacrifice is and witchcraft or sorcery, divination. They are all anti-God things. But what is this that they did, "selling themselves to do evil."? It sounds like prostitution. That is what you say when a woman gives herself for money, she sells herself in that kind of fornication or adultery, but it has got a nuance that maybe is a little better. This "selling themselves to do evil" can be thought of in terms of, or translated as, "they became completely enslaved to ungodliness or unrighteousness." And with what it says there at the beginning of verse 16, we could say that they became completely enslaved to anti-godliness. They became anti-God.

I know that sounds extreme, but this is what he says in verses 16 and 17. That they went *completely* against God. It was not just one or two little things. It was *everything*—the whole scope of their lives and all the activities within it were anti-God. All their thoughts, all their speech to one another. It had just become so bad that it was totally perverse. What he implies here, whoever the author is, is that they were deliberately in all-out rebellion against God through sin. The indictment is that God had every reason to punish them.

I do want to look at Roman 6 right now because this is the gist of what we are talking about. The apostle Paul obviously knew all this history and maybe he was using this as a background for what he says here to us about being slaves of sin.

**Romans 6:16** Do you not know that to whom you present yourself slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

**Romans 6:19** I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness

[meaning before they were converted], so now [that you are converted] present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

Just as you once did everything contrary to God and you were slaves of that lifestyle, now you need to turn it around and go completely to the other extreme. Now that you are slaves of God, you have to practice in your life all the righteousness that leads to true holiness and purity.

**Romans 6:20-21** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free [that is, unrestrained] in regard to righteousness. [When you were slaves of sin, you did not care about righteousness at all, you wanted to do all the sinful things.] What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? [What was the result of all that sinfulness and wickedness?] For the end of these things is death.

That could be the warrant for Israel. They were doing the exact same thing that Paul describes in Romans 6:16, 19-21. They had become slaves of their anti-God lifestyle.

Let us go to Ezekiel 16. We are getting to the end. This is a well known section where Ezekiel, or God through Ezekiel, proclaims what Israel had done, or in this case, He is mostly speaking to Judah. Let us read verses 1 and 2.

**Ezekiel 16:1-2** Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations [Let Jerusalem know what I have got against them.], and say, 'Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite."

Remember the first sermon I gave on all this. This is basically saying, these are your spiritual forebears. You are not My kids in terms of way you think. You think like the Amorites and the Hittites.

**Ezekiel 16:8** "When I passed by you again and looked upon you [this was very early in the relationship], indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God.

So He reminds them of the covenant. He reminds them of what He had done and what they had agreed to.

**Ezekiel 16:15-34** "But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. [Talking about their love for religion, but it was all wrong, all perverse.] You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you—you set it before them [these idols] as sweet incense; and so it was," says the Lord God. "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. [This is the child sacrifice.] Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire? [A lot of people equate this with our scourge of abortion, giving their children up to their own so-called sexual freedom.]

And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood. Then it was so, after all your wickedness—"Woe, woe to you!" says the Lord God—that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry. You

also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. [The Gentiles were ashamed of Israel's and Judah's lewd behavior!] You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied. [Does this sound like the sexual appetite of modern Israel? This is in political terms, but it certainly applies in physical terms.] How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot. You erected your shrine at the head of every road and built your high place in every street. Yet you are not like a harlot, because you scorned payment. You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband. Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers [flipped it on its head], and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry. You are the opposite of other women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite."

It is total perversity.

**Ezekiel 16:46-52** "Your elder sister is Samaria [Israel], who dwells with her daughters to the north of you [in exile]; and your younger sister, who dwells to the south of you, is Sodom and her daughters. You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I live," says the Lord God, "neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed

abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit. Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations which you have done. You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also, because the sins which you committed were more abominable than theirs; they were more righteous than you. Yes, be disgraced also, and bear your own shame, because you justified your sisters."

Judah was worse than Israel after another 100 years or so. God lists the same sins in His indictment of Judah that He brought against Israel. The picture God paints is one of utter perversion, wickedness, and shameful behavior, brazenly flaunting their rebellion in God's face. Now, perhaps having seen all this, we can better appreciate God's forbearance and mercy in the face of our sins. The things He puts up with before He acts. But eventually the piper must be paid.

Moving ahead to the 20th chapter of Ezekiel. We will start in verse 10.

**Ezekiel 20:10-17** [He is talking about children of Israel in Egypt.] "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which if a man does, he shall live in them [or by them].' Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out. So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, 'flowing with milk and honey,' the glory of all lands, because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness."

This goes on a few times, where He says the same things about them in different times of their history. But what He is focusing on here, apart from the idolatry, is their failure to keep His Sabbaths. That is why He says that He was turning a deaf ear to them and punishing them through the Babylonians. He repeats the gist of this Sabbath covenant, which we find in Exodus 31:12-17, that the Sabbath is a sign that sets them apart as His people. Once they abandoned the Sabbath, they very quickly lost their knowledge of the true God because they lost their touch with Him. It is on the Sabbath that we have the most intimate relationship connection with our God. That is the time when we come to learn about Him, and to think about these things and His way.

The result was, that in rejecting His Sabbath, they drifted farther from Him every week until they became wholehearted pagans. It did not take long. And after the exile, still not keeping the Sabbath, they even forgot who they were. They not only forgot who God was, they forgot who they were, and thus they are the lost tribes of Israel. They blended into the world because there was nothing that separated them from the world. One of the chief hallmarks of the Sabbath is that it makes us different. It sets us apart, it makes *us* set apart a day in which we are focused on God and He could then teach us so that we learn His way, and with God's Spirit, we can actually follow Him and do those things.

We can conclude then that the Sabbath is *the* linchpin of God's law, It holds everything together and it facilitates the relationship between God and His people. When people forsake the Sabbath, they are essentially forsaking God Himself, and that is the result. Thus the vital exhortation in Hebrews 10:25 not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, which the author there tells the Hebrews not to do. Do not forget the Sabbath! That is what your forebears did in Judah and they forgot God and became wicked.

I was going to go to Hosea too where we see the metaphor there of Hosea and his wife and his three children. But we will skip that. Martin went over that not too long ago.

**Isaiah 29:22-24** Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall not now be

ashamed, nor shall his face now grow pale; but when he sees his children, the work of My hands in his midst, they will hallow My name, and hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel. These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine."

I went to this because this is the light at the end of the tunnel, this is the hope of Israel. We understand that despite putting them away, He says in Hosea there that "they are not My people," God is not finished with Israel. As He says in verse 14, which we will not read, He will do a marvelous work and a wonder, and that marvelous work and wonder that He is going to do is turning wicked, anti-God Israel back to Him.

It seems impossible that He could change a nation like that, but He is going to. They will ultimately hallow His name and fear Him, finally!, after thousands of years. But that marvelous work will only come about through great tribulation, which God calls the time of Jacob's trouble, a lot of anguish and very harsh lessons that they will learn. And someday, in the resurrection, Jacob will not be ashamed of his descendants.

Next time we are going to consider Judah and their exile and return to Judea in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ, which is the real beginning in His move to redeem and restore Israel.