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Ezekiel - Lesson 18-19

Chapters 18-19

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- Let's return to Chapter 18 and to the Lord's response to Israel's seventh excuse
 - The exiles of Israel sitting in captivity in Babylon had reasons they thought they could justifiably ignore the Lord's warnings of judgment
 - The Lord told them through Ezekiel that the city of Jerusalem was on the verge of total destruction at the hands of Babylon
 - And it was about to suffer this fate because of the many sins of Israel, perpetrated against God and their covenant through Moses
 - But the people wouldn't believe that such a destruction was likely or even possible
 - So they told themselves eight excuses for why they could safely ignore the prophet's warnings
 - Last week we looked at the sixth and seventh excuses, which were related to one another
 - Israel's sixth excuse proposed that God would never hold the current generation of Israel accountable for the sins of prior generations
 - The Lord answered that objection by reminding the nation of how sinful they themselves were
 - They repeated the pattern of sin of prior generations
 - They had evil kings as did prior generations and they followed their kings into all manner of depravity
 - So this generation was equally guilty and therefore equally due judgment
- But the Lord's response simply prompted the people to give a new excuse, their seventh excuse
 - The people said that if judgment was truly coming, then there was no purpose in repenting as Ezekiel demanded
 - There was nothing to be gained in their repentance
 - They would pay for the sins of the nation regardless, since they couldn't change the past
 - We read through v.20 last week, as the Lord corrected Israel again
 - He said He never holds a person accountable for the sin of another
 - Each person is accountable for his or her own sin before the Lord
 - And therefore, if a Jew living under the Law of Moses acted righteously, that is if he obeyed the covenant, then he would live
 - But if he disobeyed, he would die as the Law required
 - When we looked at these statements last week, I told you that "live" and "die" refer to physical life and death, not spiritual life or death
 - The Lord was simply expressing the reality of the Law's power over those who lived under it
 - Just like our laws today, if we obey them, we will enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness
 - If we disobey the law, we should expect to suffer the consequences
 - In Israel's case, the Law given through Moses specified death for anyone who

failed to live obediently under the Law

- Mistakes could be made, and when they were made a sacrifice must be offered at the temple
- But for the Jew who purposely disobeyed the Law or refused to participate in the sacrificial system, the Law required a penalty of death
- So the Lord has told Israel that they are paying the price for their own sins, not for the sins of their forefathers
- And the price that the Law required was death
- Nevertheless, there was still good reason for Israel to consider repenting in the face of the prophet's warnings
 - Because if they repented, the Lord was willing to grant them mercy and spare their lives
 - Let's pick up there again tonight as we move to the end of this chapter and enter into Chapter 19

Ezek. 18:21 “But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezek. 18:22 “All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

Ezek. 18:23 “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?”

Ezek. 18:24 “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

- Here we find the Lord's argument against the seventh excuse that their repentance would be useless at this point
 - The Lord says not so, repentance very much still matters...because it's the only way the wicked will save their earthly lives
 - In v.21 the Lord promises that if the wicked among the people of Israel turn from their sins and observe the Law again, they will survive the coming invasion
 - In earlier chapters Ezekiel told the people that the third invasion was going to be devastating and no one will escape it
 - But now the Lord now says that when Nebuchadnezzar's army assaults the city for the third time, those who have repented will be spared
 - They won't be spared from the attack or even from the captivity
 - But they will be spared from the sword
 - They will be permitted to go into captivity safely and while in captivity, the

- Lord will care for them
 - Simply put, they may share in Ezekiel's fate rather than Zedekiah's fate
- Now take note of how generous the Lord's mercy is for Israel
 - If they repent at this late point, the Lord will not remember their past sins under the Old Covenant
 - That's quite some leniency
 - The people of this generation – like prior generations – were intensely wicked people
 - They engaged in sexual perversion, gross idolatry and even child sacrifice
 - And yet the Lord was willing to spare their lives overlooking the requirements of the Law simply because they heeded the prophet and repented
- Now once more, we're talking about matters in relationship to the Old Covenant, which are never matters of eternal salvation
 - No one receives eternal life by following the Law...the Bible is clear about that
 - So when the Lord calls for repentance, He means repenting of living in defiance to the Law
 - And when the Lord promises He will not remember their sins, He is speaking of their sins under the Law
 - Finally, when He promises the repentant sinner may live, He simply means they will be spared the penalty of the Law, which was physical death
- None of these things are speaking about eternal matters
 - This was not a call to repent so that they might escape judgment in eternity
 - He is not suggesting they can receive eternal life by abiding by the Law
 - Salvation eternally is only found by faith in the Messiah
 - In this case, the Lord is offering His people an escape from an earthly judgment coming because of their sins under the Old Covenant
- We get our confirmation of this interpretation in v.24, when the Lord says that the one who lives righteousness at first but then commits iniquity will not live
 - Clearly, that statement can only be true of someone living under the Old Covenant
 - The Old Covenant stood ready to condemn anyone living under it at any time
 - A man could live 80 years observing the Law yet if he ceased obeying the Law in 81st year, he would then suffer the penalty of the law and die
 - His first 80 years of obedience wouldn't exempt him from that penalty in his 81st year
 - No different than if we refrained from murder for 80 years but then committed murder in our 81st year
 - The law would still require the judge throw the book at us
 - But that's not how the grace of the New Covenant works for those who are in that covenant by faith in Jesus
 - When we come to faith in Jesus, our sins are covered and paid for by the blood of Christ

- That includes sins past, present and future
 - Simply put, you can't sin your way out of a covenant of grace
 - The Bible says that by your faith in Jesus you are forgiven and eternally a child of God
- So the Lord was promising a way to live for those in Israel who practiced idolatry under the Old Covenant
 - He would extend that mercy to anyone who repented, even to those who had committed many sins for many years
 - But for those who did not repent, the full penalty of the Law would come down on their heads...they would die in the invasion
 - The Babylonians would effectively serve as the Lord's judges and executioners to carry out the terms of the covenant against Israel
 - And this penalty would come even against those who had previously lived righteously but had become caught up in Israel's idolatry
- Nevertheless, the Lord was not bloodthirsty in bringing this judgment
 - Notice in v.23 the Lord asks rhetorically do I have any pleasure in seeing people dying, even the wicked?
 - No, the Lord says, He would rather see the wicked repent and live longer on earth
 - Of course, for those of us who know the Lord by His Spirit and word, this statement is not surprising
 - We stand amazed at the grace of God, at what He did to redeem us and set us free from sin and bring us into glory in eternity
 - But that makes it even more remarkable that God also cares about how long we live on the earth
 - He even cares about the length of life of the sinful unbeliever
 - He desires to see men and women living their lives as a testimony, a record of obedience
 - That's God's heart...that our lives might be a canvas on which He paints a story of His faithfulness to us and our obedience to Him
 - So He says He takes no pleasure in bringing judgment against the wicked
 - Nor does He enjoy ending life earlier than necessary in order to put an end to such wickedness
 - Rather, the Lord takes pleasure in seeing the evil turn from their ways, and by that repentance, living a while longer on earth
 - But one way or another, the Lord will make each person's life a testimony – either of obedience or judgment
 - But He makes clear here which of those two roads He prefers
 - That's remarkable insight into the heart of the Almighty God
 - That even though God is sovereign and brings all history to an appointed end...nonetheless our place in that plan still matters to Him

- We are not just pawns on a chessboard that God moves around indiscriminately and dispassionately
- Certainly, believers are those chosen of God, holy and beloved in Christ, and loved into eternity
- But even those in Israel who weren't believing were still precious to God such that He desired they might live in peace under His law
 - He asked them to obey His word, so they would have a blessing of a longer, more peaceful life
 - It could have been a win-win for them...obey and live longer
 - And maybe, by their obedience to the Law, the Lord would have led some to a saving faith in Messiah too
 - But most never heard this call or knew of God's mercy
 - They were too busy making excuses

Ezek. 18:25 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?”

Ezek. 18:26 “When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die.

Ezek. 18:27 “Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.

Ezek. 18:28 “Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezek. 18:29 “But the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?”

- Despite the Lord's offer of mercy, the people continue to insist that the Lord is not dealing rightly with them
 - Yet it's complete hypocrisy and self-deception
 - The Lord calls them out plainly asking are not their ways the problem?
 - The Lord is actually acting righteously, holding His people accountable to the very covenant the nation agreed to keep
 - So though they were disobeying the word of their covenant with the Lord, He was intent on keeping His word
 - And in that word, the Lord promised to bring these penalties against the people for their sins
 - But the Lord was going even beyond the terms of the covenant in that He was willing to spare their lives
 - The covenant called for the death of the one who set aside the Law of Moses
 - Still, the Lord was offering clemency
 - Without a doubt the Lord was dealing rightly with Israel, despite the people's

claims to the contrary

- Unfortunately, this is human nature...to blame both the messenger and anyone who would hold us accountable
 - If we violate the law, we blame the policeman who tickets us and the judge who sentences us
 - The policeman was just the messenger...he or she was just delivering the news that we have violated the law
 - And the judge is simply carrying out the terms of the Law, holding us accountable as the law requires
 - Don't we feel anger or resentment toward them?
 - Like it's unjust, they haven't listened to our excuses
 - And yet, if we remain objective we must agree that they are not the problem... it was our unrighteousness that created the circumstance
 - And it's further unrighteousness to turn from the results they have determined for our consequences
- Still, it requires a godly and mature perspective to appreciate this truth and to live according to it
 - And Israel lacked that insight...they saw Ezekiel, God's messenger, as the problem
 - And they blamed God for being unfair when He promised to hold them accountable under the Law
 - But the Lord refutes their hypocrisy reminding them that He acts in perfect fairness and justice as He holds His people accountable
 - Look, if you're strategy for your own judgment moment boils down to debating with God over whether you were truly as bad as He says, let me encourage you to rethink that plan
 - You aren't going to twist the facts or put a pretty face on your behavior
 - And the Lord isn't going to entertain such hypocrisy
 - He will be shown to be the perfect judge that He is, and His judgments will stand apart from your protests
 - As Jesus says

Mark 4:22 “For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light.

- So the nation's seventh excuse was completely bankrupt as have been all their excuses, so the Lord sums up His response at the end of the chapter

Ezek. 18:30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.

Ezek. 18:31 “Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will

you die, O house of Israel?

Ezek. 18:32 “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

- The nation of Israel had allowed their sin of idolatry to become a stumbling block to them
 - We usually think of a stumbling block as that thing that leads us *into* sin, and that is true
 - But the Bible also talks of sin itself being a stumbling block anytime our investment in sinful practices impedes our ability to repent
 - We can become so wedded to our lifestyle of sin or to a particular type of sin that putting it away becomes too great a loss
 - We are deceived by the sin into thinking that keeping it is somehow better for us than letting it go
 - That was Israel’s problem...they were so invested in their idolatry and sexual perversions that they couldn’t see a way out
 - They couldn’t imagine a life without such things
 - And in that way their iniquity became a stumbling block
 - It was as if they heard the call of God to repent and even desired to save their lives from the impending judgement
 - Yet as their hearts contemplated moving in that direction, they came up against the reality of walking away from the life they knew, and it was too much to ask
 - They stumbled over their sin, and so they remained in it
- The writer of Hebrews describes a similar concern for the believer who indulges their sin too long

Heb. 3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Heb. 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

- As the writer appeals to believers in the church, he draws upon the experiences of the unbelieving generation of Israel that left Egypt
 - Though they had been exposed to great signs and wonders during the Exodus, nevertheless their hearts remained unchanged
 - They were an unbelieving generation, the writer says elsewhere
- And they remained in that state because they had been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, specifically of the sin of apostasy
 - As we pursue sin over time, we learn to live in rebellion against God – which is apostasy
 - And as we become comfortable with apostasy, we become deceived into thinking

we can get away with this

- Things have worked out to our advantage so far, or so we suppose
- We aren't thinking about our judgment or the consequences of our behavior... we're just lost in our moment of sin, enjoying the fruit of it
- That's what it means to be deceived by sin: to think that there is nothing at risk, nothing to worry about, nothing to gain by repentance
 - And that attitude will harden the heart
 - A hard heart is not receptive to God's offer of mercy
 - It has no interest in mercy because it doesn't sense jeopardy
- Soft hearts, on the other hand, are hearts that can sympathize with God's own sorrow over our rebellion
 - A soft heart hears the counsel of the Spirit, responds to conviction in a healthy way
 - And in the end, desires to return to God much like the prodigal son turned back and went home
 - Remember, in that parable the son eventually returns because he remembers that his father is a kind man who treats even his servants well
- That's the heart God desires in His children, so that even when we wander away for a time we might be won back by His love
 - So that as the Lord says in v.32, I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies
 - He would rather see us repent and live
 - For Israel, He called for repentance under the Law so they might live a longer life
 - And ultimately, to everyone, God calls for repentance from dead works and turning to Christ in faith so that we might live eternally
- Finally, we're now ready to begin Israel's 8th excuse, the final attempt to remain skeptical of Ezekiel's prophecies
 - And appropriately enough, the people chose to place their hope for salvation in the very men who had brought them into this situation in the first place: their kings
 - Since the division of Israel following Solomon, the southern half of Judah had swung back and forth between good kings and bad kings
 - Good kings typically required Israel to follow the Law and did not tolerate idolatry
 - These kings became a blessing to the land and the people
 - But increasingly, the people were ruled by evil men who encouraged idolatry and all the sinful practices that accompanied idols
 - These men were largely responsible for the downfall of the people and the judgment that was not coming to rest upon them
 - These men killed the prophets sent to them to warn them of God's displeasure in them

- And yet the people continued to embrace each one and follow after his wicked ways
 - Yet even as they were now sitting in exile as a result of what these evil leaders had done, the people were still expecting God to raise up a new king to save them
 - And so this became their final excuse to ignore Ezekiel...they said that they need not fear Babylon because a king would save them
 - Somehow, a new king would come to the throne, in the line of David, who could vanquish the Babylonian army
 - It was fantasy, of course, and it just reflects how self-deceived the people had become
 - Since after two attacks already, it should have been obvious to everyone that no king could resurrect the glory of Israel under these circumstances
- So the Lord responds through Ezekiel once more to set aside this excuse
 - And in this chapter, the Lord takes a unique approach with His answer: He sends Israel a lamentation for their kings
 - A lamentation is a form of poetry written as historical commentary over some tragedy or disaster
 - We have a book of the Bible written by Jeremiah called Lamentations, which records the third and final attack of Babylon on Jerusalem
 - That entire book laments what Ezekiel is prophesying about here: the coming destruction of the city
 - But in this one chapter of Ezekiel, we have a mini lamentation over the downfall of the dynasty of David in Israel; the end of kings ruling
 - The prophecy has two parts...the first part uses allegory of a lioness and her cubs while the second part uses an allegory of a vine

Ezek. 19:1 “As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel

Ezek. 19:2 and say,

‘What was your mother?

A lioness among lions!

She lay down among young lions,

She reared her cubs.

Ezek. 19:3 ‘When she brought up one of her cubs,

He became a lion,

And he learned to tear his prey;

He devoured men.

Ezek. 19:4 ‘Then nations heard about him;

He was captured in their pit,

And they brought him with hooks

To the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 19:5 ‘When she saw, as she waited,

That her hope was lost,

She took another of her cubs

And made him a young lion.

Ezek. 19:6 ‘And he walked about among the lions;
 He became a young lion,
 He learned to tear his prey;
 He devoured men.

Ezek. 19:7 ‘He destroyed their fortified towers
 And laid waste their cities;
 And the land and its fullness were appalled
 Because of the sound of his roaring.

Ezek. 19:8 ‘Then nations set against him
 On every side from their provinces,
 And they spread their net over him;
 He was captured in their pit.

Ezek. 19:9 ‘They put him in a cage with hooks
 And brought him to the king of Babylon;
 They brought him in hunting nets
 So that his voice would be heard no more
 On the mountains of Israel.

- This is part 1, and the allegory centers around a lioness and her cubs
 - Now before we go very far in interpreting the allegory, we have one obvious detail to work from right from the start
 - When working in the context of Israel, the symbolism of a lion in scripture is very clear
 - It represents the Davidic line of rulers that come out of Judah
 - In fact the lion of Judah is a term that refers to the coming Messianic ruler of Israel, born in the line of David
 - So an allegory about lions points in the direction of the Davidic line of kings in Israel
 - And the details of the allegory match that context well
 - Notice the lamentation is addressed to the “princes” of Israel, and prince is another term in the Bible for a king or leader of people
 - Which is further confirmation that the allegory is speaking about the kings of Judah
 - So this lamentation is directed to any man within Israel during Ezekiel’s day who thought he might assume the throne of David
 - In v.2 the allegory begins asking such a man, what was your mother?
 - Or we could say, where do the kings of Israel come from?
 - And the answer is they are cubs of a lioness
 - The former kings of Israel were like a lioness that produced cubs
 - So each generation of king would have sons, naturally, and in time these sons would become king in their day
 - So the allegory describes each king raising up the next generation of kings

- Then in v.3 we learn that in a particular day, a certain king (i.e., lion cub) came to power and took control of the kingdom
 - He learned to tear his prey apart
 - A lion doesn't typically tear its prey apart
 - It eats it, of course, but the lamentation is describing something different
 - This is describing the lion tearing its prey to pieces with great savagery and senselessness
 - Moreover, the lion started devouring men
 - As this king went about his tirade of rule, we're told in v.4 that another nation heard of his antics and took advantage of the turmoil in Israel
 - This foreign power, Egypt, captured him in a pit and brought him back in chains
 - These events describe the reign of King Jehoahaz, which you can read about in 2 Kings 23:31

2Kings 23:31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

2Kings 23:32 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

2Kings 23:33 Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

2Kings 23:34 Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away and brought him to Egypt, and he died there.

- After Jehoahaz was imprisoned in Egypt, the Judean people held out some hope that their king would be returned
 - Despite his tyranny, the people still wanted him back on the throne
 - Yet he never returned, which serves as a lesson to the people in Ezekiel's day that they ought not wish for the Lord to reinstate an evil king
 - Given Jehoahaz' experience, history says He isn't likely to do it
- Then in v.5, the allegory goes on to describe the mother lioness, meaning the line of David, raising up another cub to fill the place on the throne
 - We hear him mentioned in 2 Kings 31 also; the man Jehoiachin
 - Jehoiachin was the grandson of the last good king of Judah, Josiah and he was the next cub to occupy the throne
 - Technically, there was another king that came between Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, the man mentioned in 2 Kings 31; Jehoiakim
 - That king is skipped in this story because he too only lasted 3 months and this story is focused on the end not the middle

- So in vs.6-9 we hear that this second “cub” was just as bad as the prior king (no surprise there)
 - He came to power after the Babylonians had already conquered Judah once, and as he did, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar
 - He destroyed the fortifications that Babylon constructed in the land
 - And he rampaged over his own people raping the land and the cities of wealth
 - Naturally, this appalled Babylon, which conquered Judah again and hauled off Jehoiachin back to Babylon
- Notice at the end of v.9, the lamentation comments that the sound of the lion cub’s voice would no longer be heard in the land
 - This wasn’t just a comment about Jehoiachin
 - It was a commentary on the immediate future of the Davidic line
 - The Babylonian captivity put an end to the line of David ruling in Israel for a time
- Which brings us to the second part of the chapter’s allegory: the vine

Ezek. 19:10 ‘Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard,

Planted by the waters;

It was fruitful and full of branches

Because of abundant waters.

Ezek. 19:11 ‘And it had strong branches fit for scepters of rulers,

And its height was raised above the clouds

So that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.

Ezek. 19:12 ‘But it was plucked up in fury;

It was cast down to the ground;

And the east wind dried up its fruit.

Its strong branch was torn off

So that it withered;

The fire consumed it.

Ezek. 19:13 ‘And now it is planted in the wilderness,

In a dry and thirsty land.

Ezek. 19:14 ‘And fire has gone out from its branch;

It has consumed its shoots and fruit,

So that there is not in it a strong branch,

A scepter to rule.’”

This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

- The subject of this lamentation hasn’t changed, though the imagery does
 - Now we’re looking at a vine, which is a classic bridal picture of Israel
 - So speaking of the nation as a whole, the lamentation says in v10 that the nation was planted in a fruitful place by God
 - And it had “strong” branches to uphold the scepters of its rulers
 - In other words, the Davidic line of kings were a strong and majestic jewel in

the crown of Israel

- The nation and its rulers prospered in the land because they obeyed the Lord and He blessed that obedience
 - At the height of its glory, the nation had such strong branches that it “rose above the clouds” in v.11
 - It’s height was seen from everywhere, speaking of the days of David and particularly Solomon when Israel was the power of the world
 - But in a certain day, the vine was uprooted from the land in a fury, according to v.12
 - The reign of kings was cast to the ground and torn off, and fire consumed it
 - This is picturing the end of the line of kings ruling in Judah when Babylon brought an end to the city and to any king reigning in the land
 - As Ezekiel speaks this prophecy to Israel, these events had not yet come to pass
 - So at v.10 and beyond, the lamentation become a prophecy
 - Notice in v.14 it ends saying this is a lamentation and has become a lamentation
 - That two part statement refers to the way this poetry is half history, half prophecy
 - And the second part of prophecy is describing Zedekiah’s end, when he was captured in the third and final invasion
 - He is hauled back to Babylon with the remaining Jews, resulting in the vine being uprooted
- The point of the lamentation is pretty clear: the exiles in Babylon were only fooling themselves if they believed that the Davidic line was going to rescue them
 - The final king of their age was already on the throne, Zedekiah
 - And the lamentation predicted he would end up in Babylon with them
 - And after him there would be no scepter in the land of Israel
 - And therefore, there was no chance of a future king rescuing them from Ezekiel’s prophecies
 - Reading from Thomas Constable’s commentary

It is appropriate that this last section in the part of the book that consists of Yahweh's reply to the invalid hopes of the Israelites (chs. 12—19) should be a lament. Judah's doom was certain, so a funeral dirge was fitting. All the exiles could do was mourn the divine judgment on their nation that was to reach its climax very soon.

Not until Jesus Christ returns to the earth to reign will a strong branch and the ruler's scepter arise in the line of David again.

- We have just one section of prophecy remaining regarding Jerusalem’s fall

- It consists of the next four chapters
 - It consists of a review of Israel's rebellious history, including the history of its leaders
 - And it includes some graphic descriptions of the nation's perversions and sins under these leaders
 - It uses colorful parables and allegories
 - And it ends with one of the most bizarre series of events in all scripture