

Series: Questions

Title: Shall Covenant-Breakers Prosper? (2 of 2)

Text: Ezekiel 17: 1-24

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Place: SGBC, New Jersey

Our subject is a question God asks a sinner—concerning a sinner who breaks a covenant, his oath, his vow:

Ezekiel 17: 15: Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such *things*? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?

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Ezekiel 17: 11: Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 12: Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these *things mean*? tell *them*, Behold, the king of Babylon [Nebuchadnezzar, the first great eagle] is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, [Jeconiah] and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon; 13: And hath taken of the king's seed, [Zedekiah—made king in Jeconiah's place] and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land: 14: That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, *but* that by keeping of his covenant it might stand. 15: But [Zedekiah] rebelled against him [Nebuchadnezzar] in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, [Pharaoh] that they might give him horses and much people. 15: Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such *things*? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?

16: As I live, saith the Lord GOD, [God swears by himself] surely in the place *where* the king *dwelleth* that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, *even* with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. 17: Neither shall Pharaoh with *his* mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons: 18: Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these *things*, he shall not escape. 19: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; *As I* live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. 20: And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead [reason] with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. 21: And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken *it*.

God brought Zedekiah, king of Judah, under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, he took an oath, vowing to remain humble under Zedekiah's rule. For a while he did and God prospered him. Then Zedekiah broke his covenant, despised his oath by looking to Pharaoh in Egypt to save him from Nebuchadnezzar. The question God asks is, "*Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?*"

Fact is, you and I who believe, as well as all sinners are covenant breakers who have despised our oaths—and whatever covenants we have entered. Not one sinner under the old testament ever kept the covenant of works in his flesh—from Adam until the day the veil split in two: not Adam, not Moses, not David, not Ezekiel and not today. Even if they dotted every I and crossing every T of the law outwardly—not one ever kept the covenant of works, not even the apostle Paul who said outwardly "as touching the law was blameless". The blood of lambs never put away sin, only ceremonially until the next offering. And to keep that covenant of works our sins must be put away.

Hebrews 10:1: For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

You and I who believe God have never kept a single covenant from the heart perfectly—not old testament law nor any covenant entered into in our lifetime. Shall the covenant breaker prosper? What if a believer breaks some earthly covenant that God hates—shall he prosper?

Every person who breaks covenant, even if only in his heart, lies to God and must die under the holy judgment of God. Some shall die in their flesh and go to hell under the judgment of God as did Zedekiah. Others were crucified in Christ by the grace of God and constrained in their hearts by Christ's love to repent from their sins and cast all care on Christ. Only the sovereign grace of God makes the difference—that same grace constrains a believer to honor our covenant's outwardly.

But what if a true believer breaks their covenant, shall they escape? Shall a believer prosper anytime we turn to our sinful flesh from Christ? No, God shall chasten us with sore chastening and bring us to repentance. The reason God brought Judah under Babylonian captivity was for his elect who God loved to chasten them

Proposition: Since Christ fulfilled the old covenant of works on behalf of his people and brought us under the covenant of grace, God our Father will chasten those he loves to keep his believing child looking only to Christ—that is what I want to show from this passage.

CHASTENING TO HUMBLE

Ezekiel 17: 3:...[the king of Babylon] came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar 6...he placed *it* by great waters, *and* set it *as* a willow tree...14: That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, *but* that by keeping of his covenant it might stand.

God's purpose in chastening his child is to humble his child. Notice how God describes the people of Judah. God called Judah *Lebanon* because of their pride—Lebanon was place of proud cedars. God chastened his elect to bring them down from being proud cedars to make them weeping willows—he declares that in the last verses of the chapter. He brings down the lofty tree of our flesh and dries it up that the kingdom might be base—humbled. That it might not lift itself up in pride.

Be sure get this. God does not correct his saints because his child has to keep a covenant of works—he corrects us to keep us looking to Christ alone, in whom the everlasting covenant is ordered in all things and sure.

Think how offensive this was to the king. He is king of the choicest tribe, Judah, of the choicest house, the house of David. Consider how degrading to be carried captive to dwell in Babylon. What a blow to his pride! But God was humbling his true people in Judah. God often chastens you and I who believe due to pride; pride is enemy number one and God hates it.

Brethren, when God puts us in trying situations the pain is usually our fleshly pride. But remember how the Son of God willingly came down to this degrading place? Remember, Christ willingly put himself in painful circumstances to save us? Christ did so willingly! How did the Lord Jesus save his people: by pride or humility? By humble obedience to God his Father.

Philippians 2: 3: *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4: Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Though Christ is God, in perfect humility, our Righteous Savior became the Father's servant, to fulfill his Father's will.

John 5:30: I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

John 6:38: For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

When the trial causes great pain then use it to remember the pain Christ suffered to redeem you, believer—Christ perfected God's will by dying the shameful cross. Oh, how painful? The shame of sin, the wrath of the Father, separation from God. Yet what did Christ pray in the garden of Gethsemane?

Matthew 26:39: And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Hebrews 10: 9: Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first,[covenant of works] that he may establish the second. [covenant of grace] 10: By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

When God chastens us believer, he places us in a place or circumstance we may not like. If you are in a relationship where you face difficulty then consider that it may be God humbling you. So wait on God to work in that person. If you are at work with a superior who is abusing their power. Remember, it may be God is humbling you. So wait on God to work in that boss. If we have sickness or pain. It could be God is humbling us. So wait on God.

Never rise up in pride like Zedekiah and try to deliver ourselves from the trial. Remember God is doing this—I cannot get out from under God's hand. Remember, God is saving me from me—from my pride, from my sinful nature, from my will and my works back to Christ.

Zedekiah took matters into his own hands. He was saying I do not care what God says. He broke his covenant because of sinful fleshly wants. It was the lusts of his flesh. He lifted his hand against God in utter pride by breaking his covenant. That is what we do when we run from the trial and turn from God's covenant of grace and/or break a covenant in earth.

Wait on God to exalt us in due time. After Christ humbled himself under God's hand, after accomplishing God's will. after suffering the cross and redeeming his people from all iniquity—when God's will be accomplished, we read,

Philippians 2: 9: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

Peter knew this didn't he? He said,

1 Peter 5: 5:...Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

That is how we should deal with every trial. Humble ourselves under God's might hand, casting all our care on Christ.

NOT TO DESTROY BUT FOR GOOD

Ezekiel 17: 5:...plant [them] in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters....8: It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine.

When God chastens, remember, it is not to destroy his child. It is for our good. Even in chastening, God remembers mercy for his chosen. God ruled Nebuchadnezzar to put his chosen people in a fertile place where they could profit.

Brethren, when God brings you into a trial under his chastening hand, God is still providing our *needs*—not fleshly wants but needs. Christ is still our righteousness before God. God's everlasting covenant of grace has not changed. And God provides our *temporal* needs as well

Psalm 37:25 I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

Notice what happened while Zedekiah humbled himself under Nebuchadnezzar's hand—**Ezekiel 17: 6: And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs**

When God chastens with perplexing, painful providence, remember God's grace is sufficient right where you are. Our salvation is not in the circumstances. Our salvation is not a change of conditions. Our salvation is God's all-sufficient grace! God's grace provides even in the midst of trials. For example, God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to buffet him—to cause Paul pain and humble him.

2 Corinthians 12: 7: And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8: For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10: Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Our Lord Jesus prayed *three times* in the garden of Gethsemane. That is how—as the GodMan—he knew how to comfort Paul. What happened to our Savior when he prayed three times? God the Father sent an angel to strengthen the Lord Jesus. Christ shall send the Spirit of God and strengthen you, believer.

WHAT AM I DOING?

Ezekiel 17: 15 But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people.

If I rebel against God's chastening hand what am I doing? If I outwardly break a covenant or oath in this life what am I doing? Egypt were their former captives. If we break an earthly covenant or turn from the everlasting covenant to our works or rebel during chastening then we are looking to Egypt—to our sinful flesh—from which God already delivered us. The king of Judah rebelled because of sinful fleshly “wants” rather than his “needs.” He thought the grass was greener on the other side. If we do that we are looking to our will, our works, our wisdom—away from the Lord Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Shall covenant-breakers prosper? God has already delivered his child from the bondage of our Egyptian sinful flesh in Christ so he will not allow us to prosper in our sinful flesh. It would result in us being totally overcome by our sin-nature. Our faithful heavenly Father will not allow that.

Also, remember, if I break a covenant and oath or vow to some person we are breaking a covenant with God—**Ezekiel 17: 19: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head.** Though our covenant to another person, it is to God. Therefore, to break it I am lying to God, despising God. In truth, Zedekiah wanted out from under God's hand. So do we when our sinful flesh overcomes us. It is what we do when we break a vow or run into sin. We sin against Christ. We turn from his everlasting covenant of grace back to the covenant of works. It is what we do when we rebel against God's chastening hand of providence. We are never justified to rebel against God out of discontent over the trial God has sent us.

SHALL WE PROSPER?

Ezekiel 17: 15: Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?

Shall God allow a true child of God to prosper if he rebels against God in his sinful flesh? When Zedekiah broke his covenant, God brought him to the feet of the king *for judgment*: Nebuchadnezzar killed his children, plucked his eyes out and he died in Babylon. But the Lord Jesus bore that judgment for his people. He has fulfilled the everlasting covenant of redemption for us. So instead of judgment, God shall sorely chasten his child in mercy and bring us back to the feet of Christ in love.

God shall mortify our flesh—**Ezekiel 17: 9:...it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring,** [when we think we will prosper, have our way, God will make our flesh and its fruit wither] **even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. 10: Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind**

toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew. It is so painful. But it is best when God mortifies our sinful flesh, breaking our plans by his grace and love.

When we sin against God the grass never turns out to be greener on the other side. Our rebellion causes lasting divisions in the earth. It causes lasting pain (the sword never left David's house). But if we are God's child then God shall chasten his child and bring us to repentance to Christ's feet.

Shall we escape? Shall he break the covenant and be delivered?—**Ezekiel 17: 16: As I live, saith the Lord GOD.** Thank God, he swears by himself in everlasting covenant grace because he can swear by no greater. God promises his child of mercy the opposite of what he promised Zedekiah. I have added some words to show you the opposite so we see it is in grace that God brings us to Christ—**Ezekiel 17: 16...surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king,** [Christ is the King who made us kings by his blood] **whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake,** [our sin is despising Christ's oath and covenant; we break a covenant to God. But this is God's unchanging grace to his people in Christ] **even with** [Christ our King] **in the midst of** [heavenly Jerusalem] **he shall** [live].

Listen to the rest of God's unchangeable covenant of mercy—**Ezekiel 17: 17: Neither shall Pharaoh** [neither shall our sinful nature] **with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounds, and building forts, to cut off many persons: 18: Seeing** [he] **despised the oath by breaking** [turning from God's everlasting covenant of grace],...**he shall not escape.** [sovereign Love arrest that child of God and mortify his flesh!] **19: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even** [this sin have I already] **recompensed** [not] **upon his own head.** [but upon the head of his Substitute, Christ Jesus] **20: And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to** [Christ in heavenly Jerusalem by sovereign grace and mercy], **and will** [reason with him] **there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me.** [when God reasons with his child what happens?] **21:...and ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken it.**

This is God's unchangeable covenant of grace toward his redeemed because—**Ezekiel 17: 22: [God]...planted** [*Christ our Substitute and Head*] **upon an high mountain and eminent: 23: In the mountain of the height of Israel**

When God does **this work in his child for Christ's sake he**—**Ezekiel 17: 24: [brings] down the high tree [of our sinful flesh], exalts** the low tree [of our inward man], **dries up the green tree** [of our sinful flesh] **and makes the dry tree** [of our inward man to be renewed and] **to flourish:** [then he makes us know] **I the LORD have spoken and have done it.**

Then what shall the believer do when he sees his trespass and sees Christ has born it away on his behalf? The same thing he did the first time

Zechariah 12: 10...they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

This is the unchanging, unchangeable sovereign love of God in Christ which brings us to repentance. No child of God shall turn from the covenant of grace and escape. God shall constrain us inwardly to repentance, and turn us to Christ alone

Proverbs 3: 5: Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6: In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Amen!