

Idolatrous Israel

(5) Ezekiel 6

By Scott Huckaby

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
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Judgment on Idolatrous Israel

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ² “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, ³ and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines, and to the valleys: “Indeed I, even I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. ⁴ Then your altars shall be desolate, your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. ⁵ And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your altars. ⁶ In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate, so that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, your idols may be broken and made to cease, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. ⁷ The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

⁸ “Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries. ⁹ Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations. ¹⁰ And they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them.”

¹¹ “Thus says the Lord God: “Pound your fists and stamp your feet, and say, ‘Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. ¹² He who is far off shall die by the pestilence, he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who remains and is besieged shall die by the famine. Thus will I spend My fury upon them. ¹³ Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols all around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every thick oak, wherever they offered sweet incense to all their idols. ¹⁴ So I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land desolate, yes, more desolate than the

wilderness toward Diblah, in all their dwelling places. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.’ ” ” ”

v1-3 – Why did God tell Ezekiel to set his face against the mountains of Israel?

This prophecy was directed against the mountains because they helped define the geography of Israel, and more importantly, they were centers of idol worship – the infamous **high places** mentioned many times in the Old Testament.

Why is God pronouncing judgment on the ravines and valleys as well as the high places?

There must have been some similar idol worship in the ravines and valleys (Isa. 57:5,6; Jer. 2:23; 7:31), perhaps sometimes cave worship of an earth-mother, or, as Isaiah and Jeremiah suggest, child sacrifice.

Why had the Israelites fallen into idol worship?

They were compromising with the world around them. They failed to eliminate the influence of the Canaanites as God had commanded and these were the consequences.

v4-7 – How would God show Israel that their idol worship was being judged?

The alters would be broken and desolate, no one would visit them.

I will cast down your slain men before your idols: God would desecrate those places set aside to pagan gods with the **bones** of unfaithful Israel.

I will scatter your bones: This was literally fulfilled by the Chaldeans. According to *Baruch*, Bar 2:24, 25, they opened the sepulchres of the principal people, and threw the bones about on every side.

The cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate: The armies of Babylon would destroy both the **cities** and the country regions.

v6 – It is clear how the idols would be broken, how would they be made to cease?

When Israel came again into the land, they never had the same problem with idolatry as before.

v7 – How would Israel, “know that I am the Lord?”

This the first use of a phrase repeated some sixty times in Ezekiel reflecting the theme of this prophet. It shows that God worked in His judgments and His restorations to reveal Himself to Israel and the world.

v8 – Who would escape the sword?

Yet I will leave a remnant: The remnant was illustrated in the acted out parable of the cut hair (Ezekiel 5:3-4). Here God specifically promised *to leave a remnant* that would be the basis of a later restoration.

When you are scattered: Some of the remnant would be among those **scattered**, and some would remain in the land.

v9 – What would characterize the remnant?

Those of you who escape will remember Me: God promised that one day that some of those who had been exiled out of the land of Israel would **remember** their covenant God and call upon His name.

Why would the remnant remember God?

Because I was crushed by their adulterous heart: God would cause the remnant to realize how Israel had been unloyal to Him. Using a human analogy, God expressed the depth of the grief He felt over Israel’s idolatry by likening Himself to a husband with a constantly unfaithful wife.

What does it mean that the Israelites were playing a harlot after their idols?

Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh was all the worse because of whom they forsook Yahweh for – empty, filthy, disgusting **idols**. Ezekiel’s choice of word for **idols** reflects that.

The word for *idols* (Heb. *gullulim*) is a favorite with Ezekiel, occurring 38 times, as versus 9 times in the rest of the Old Testament. Its derivation is likely a combination of the Hebrew words for ‘detested thing’ and ‘a pellet of dung’.

What will the remnant think of their sin which caused God to make them into exiles?

They will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed: They would be deeply ashamed for their sin. It was a terrible but necessary step in their restoration.

- One day they will realize how their sin broke the heart of the One who loved you the most and you will hate yourself for it.

v10 – How is it the calamity God brings on the remnant not be in vain?

They shall know that I am the Lord: The *calamity* God brought upon them, as severe as it was, would fulfill its corrective purpose in the people. After their repentance, they would be restored to relationship with Yahweh again. We can see a progression:

- Remembrance of God
- Repentance from sin
- Relationship restored

v11 – How was Ezekiel to deliver God’s message to the people?

Pound your fists and stamp your feet: God told Ezekiel to say the following words with these strong gestures. He needed to get the attention of Israel, because while they regarded their idolatry as a little thing; God saw them as *evil abominations*.

v11-12 – What was Ezekiel to say with his strong gestures?

They shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence: The coming judgment would be complete and devastating. As Ezekiel had said in the previous chapter, God would **spend His fury upon** them.

- The far off shall die by pestilence, the near by the sword, and famine will plague those who remain.

v13 – How is it that the remnant will know that their affliction is from God?

Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols: The fulfillment of these prophecies would demonstrate to Israel that Yahweh was their God, and worthy of their repentance. They would (and did) reject their idols after these severe judgments.

v14 – what was the significance of God stretching out His hand against them?

This references the greatness of the blow, God strikes hard when he stretches out his hand; with God you find a mighty hand joined with outstretched arm.

How desolate will God leave the land?

More desolate than the wilderness toward Diblah: Diblah was the northern limit of God’s judgments that were to fall on Israel for its idolatry. When God promised to devastate the land ‘from the desert to Diblah, that is, from the south to the north.

How would God do good for Israel even in the midst of devastating them?

Then they shall know that I am the Lord: This declares the corrective purpose God had even in this terrible judgment.

What is an idol?

Anything in our life that commands more loyalty, dedication and devotion than the one true Living God. Not necessarily the highest loyalty, since many of us are functional polytheists, whatever we claim. But sincere and central devotion.

What false deities do we have that constitute idols?

The Idol of False Deities

There are a number of religions that people practice that distract people from the God of Scripture... Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Universalism, Cheap Grace, Salvation-by-works-Christianity...

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

– John 14:6

What idols do we have in America today?

We have different names for our gods of prosperity, fertility, good luck, celebrity or whatever.

- Money and success have often been thought of as America's gods.

The Idol of Self

With the abundance of attention available through likes, loves, and followers, many have elevated themselves like Lucifer did. Their addiction to attention has focused their eyes upon themselves, rather than upon the Lord. There is no place for the self-life in the throne room of God.

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

– Luke 9:23-24

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

– Philippians 2:3-4

The Idol of Technology

Technology is a beautiful thing. It continues to progress at exponential speeds, and there are many amazing (and scary) innovations that lay ahead.

Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. – 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Technology is one of those arenas that can quickly move from icon to idol. There is no doubt that technology can and does produce immeasurable good; but it how often do you see someone “have to have” the latest smart phone, most high-end mac book, or the biggest and greatest LED tv?

- Now we are even looking to technology to save us (transhumanism). There are teams of people working to find ways to upload your brain and consciousness to a computer. Ray Kurzweil sees this happening by 2045. We want to immortalize ourselves through the use of technology. We are idolizing technology to save the self.

The Idol of Social Media

Social media has overtaken the lives of most of the population. How many times do you check your streams over and over for another new notification?

- A quick Google search reveals that people, on average, spend nearly two hours a day on social media. For some this number is even higher.
- The pleasure you get from positive notifications in your social media feed create the same dopamine response in your brain as any other addiction.
- Social media is more isolating than connecting. It segregates us to our separate quarters, destroying flesh and blood community, under the false pretense that we are still connected.

The Idol of Celebrities

We idolize celebrities by constantly seeking to mimic their dress, follow their every move, and drooling over their bodies. We mourn and publicize their deaths more than a brother or sister in Christ.

- While Jesus often had ministry, healings, and teachings in public, he regularly stood against the idea of being a celebrity. He often told people he healed in private not to tell others he did it.
- In a celebrity driven culture, influential Jesus followers have to become icons rather than celebrity idols.

The Idol of Status

The idolization of status is the aspiration that once you reach this position at work, or have this many followers on social media, or you live in that neighborhood and drive that car, then you will have made it. When those status symbols are both the end goal, and the driving force behind your life they have become an idol.

- The purpose of status, platform, and influence are not for the attention to self, but for the advancement of the Kingdom. For the Jesus follower, your status should

only make you an icon, rather than an idol. Status should point past yourself to Someone greater.

The Idol of Materialism/Consumerism

Modern America is infested with a spirit of consumerism, also known as materialism. This is the mindset and continual pursuit of material goods. It is the continual accumulation of worldly possessions. When is enough, enough?

For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. – Timothy 6:7

The Gospel calls us learn the art of contentment. We have to find our satisfaction in Christ, and Him alone.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. – 1 Timothy 6:6

If you only serve God because of what you can get out of it you will be left wanting. We don't serve God because of what he can give us. We serve God because of who He is, and what He has already done for us through His son Jesus Christ.

The Idol of Money

While the idol of money can go hand in hand with materialism and consumerism, it does not mean it always will. Many times the end goal of the pursuit of money is the purchase of worldly goods. There are others who will seek out the accumulation of money, just for the sake of having a big number in the bank account. Family, friends, and relationships of all sorts are sacrificed on the altar of money.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income.

– Ecclesiastes 5:10

To be ruled by the pursuit of money is referred to in the NT as the worship of Mammon (Matt. 6:24). Mammon is the spirit that over takes the pursuit of money, and finances that are not submitted to the Spirit of God.

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

– 1 Timothy 6:9-10

Money is not evil, but it is the roots of all kinds of evil. Money cannot save us, but one of mammon's grandest illusions is getting us to trust in money rather than God. This is the root of all kinds of evil.

What side effects can come from believing the illusion of trusting money more than God?

- neglecting the poor,
- mistreating others,
- looking to money for salvation over God,
- falling into greed,
- pursuing worldly possessions that moth and rust destroy,
- and many other evil deeds.
- Your contentment is in the Lord. He is your provision and your source.

What is the good news in this chapter condemning the worship of idols?

They shall know that I am the Lord

- The whole point is so that some would recognize the gravity of what they had done and turn to God
- God always has a remnant among both the Jews and the Gentiles.
- God invites us to be among His remnant...

Matthew 7:13-14 – Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and straight is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.