

Judges
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Ezekiel 20:1-14

The other night we happened to be at EPCOT at the time of their Christmas Candlelight Processional. I was thrilled (and somewhat amazed) as they read the Christmas story from scripture and a massive choir sang every favorite Christmas carol beautifully! It was encouraging to hear Jesus's birth heralded so plainly and traditionally at Disney World, but one statement got my attention.

The guest narrator was TV personality Lisa Ling. Before she began reading from Luke and Isaiah, she made a statement that gave me pause. She talked about how hard and divisive things have been in the last two years and how much we need the story of Christmas. Agreed! Then she said, *"We need to remember that the 'Prince of Peace' didn't come to judge and the 'Prince of Peace' didn't come to condemn."* I literally said aloud, *"That's not EXACTLY accurate."* Let's ponder her statement. Was she correct? Was she partially correct? Was it out of context? Don't answer yet. Let's come back and see what scripture really says.

Lisa Ling's statement made me think about our text for this week from Ezekiel. The title of this lesson is "[God] Judges." Lifeway's "big idea statement is this: *"God judges those who reject Him as Lord."* You may be thinking, *"This won't put me in the Christmas spirit!"* In reality, it's exactly what Christmas is all about.

The truth that should change us in this lesson is, yes, God does judge those who reject Him as Lord but Jesus came as a child, died as a Savior, and rose from the dead as our King of Kings and Lord of Lords so we can avoid that judgment.

- Most of of Israel had been in exile in Babylon for seven years when some of their leaders came to Ezekiel "requesting a message" from God.
- It was really a demand. *"It's been seven years in captivity, ask God when we can go back to Jerusalem."* One commentator: *"They were acting like a grounded teenager on day one of his two-week-long grounding."*ⁱⁱ
- Have you noticed, in a crisis, those who have ignored God will often turn to Him for deliverance but not in obedience? They don't want Him to run their life, just to provide a life raft out of the current trouble they are in.

Ezekiel 20:2-14 (NLT) — 2 Then this message came to me from the Lord: **3** "Son of man, tell the leaders of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: How dare you come to ask me for a message? As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I will tell you nothing!' **4** "Son of man, bring charges against them and condemn them. Make them realize how detestable the sins of their ancestors really were. **5** Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: When I chose Israel—when I revealed myself to the descendants of Jacob in Egypt—I took a

solemn oath that I, the Lord, would be their God. **6** I took a solemn oath that day that I would bring them out of Egypt to a land I had discovered and explored for them—a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the best of all lands anywhere. **7** Then I said to them, ‘Each of you, get rid of the vile images you are so obsessed with. Do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt, for I am the Lord your God.’ **8** “But they rebelled against me and would not listen. They did not get rid of the vile images they were obsessed with, or forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I threatened to pour out my fury on them to satisfy my anger while they were still in Egypt. **9** But I didn’t do it, for I acted to protect the honor of my name. I would not allow shame to be brought on my name among the surrounding nations who saw me reveal myself by bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. **10** So I brought them out of Egypt and led them into the wilderness. **11** There I gave them my decrees and regulations so they could find life by keeping them. **12** And I gave them my Sabbath days of rest as a sign between them and me. It was to remind them that I am the Lord, who had set them apart to be holy.

- They came demanding deliverance and God (through Ezekiel) gave them a history lesson and a judgment. He recalled how He had chosen their ancestors to be His people, delivered them from Egypt, and yet they still rebelled against Him. God was ready to destroy His rebellious people but Moses begged Him to show mercy (Ex. 32:9-10; Num. 14:11-12.)
- Verse 9 says God showed mercy “to protect the honor” of His name.

13 “But the people of Israel rebelled against me, and they refused to obey my decrees there in the wilderness. They wouldn’t obey my regulations even though obedience would have given them life. They also violated my Sabbath days. So I threatened to pour out my fury on them, and I made plans to utterly consume them in the wilderness. **14** But again I held back in order to protect the honor of my name before the nations who had seen my power in bringing Israel out of Egypt.

- God continued to show patience and mercy to His people and they thanked Him by continuing to sin by worshiping idols. Like a rebellious toddler, they wanted His provision (“milk and honey”) without any rules.
- “Give us all the blessings God, but leave us alone to do our own thing!”
- Does that sound familiar? Is this Old Testament passage relevant today?
- People sin, God has provided mercy, but there is a limit to His patience.
- 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV) says the Lord is... *“patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*
- We love that verse, but look at the next verse: **2 Peter 3:10 (ESV) — 10** But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.
- What did Jesus say about God’s patience? **John 12:35 (ESV) — 35** So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk

while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.

- God is merciful and patient, but He is also just. Justice requires judgment and a price must be paid for wrongdoing (sin,) that's why Jesus came.
- People don't want to hear that. The gospel is the "good news" but like Ezekiel, we must share the "bad news" to give meaning to the good news.
- Back to Lisa Ling's comment: "...*the 'Prince of Peace' didn't come to judge and the 'Prince of Peace' didn't come to condemn.*"
- Lisa Ling didn't unpack her statement so we can only speculate what she meant. What do YOU think she meant in context of our divided society?
- Let's go to the source. What did the Prince of Peace say about Himself?
- We know John 3:16. What do the verses following that verse say?

John 3:17–19 (ESV) — 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

- In one sense, Lisa was correct: Jesus didn't come to condemn, because we are all BORN condemned and Jesus came to give us a pardon.
- Did the Prince of Peace not come to judge? What did He say about this?
- What is the most taken-out-of-context verse on "not judging?"
- **Matthew 7:1–6 (ESV) — 1** "Judge not, that you be not judged.
- Keep reading. What is the context in which Jesus said that? Take the "log" out of your eye before you judge the "speck" in your brother's eye.
- That verse is about not being a self-righteous, judgmental hypocrite.
- In **John 7:24 (ESV) —** Jesus also said, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."
- That verse is about being discerning without being judgmental.
- When some people say we shouldn't "judge or condemn" others, they're not quoting Jesus, they are really quoting that Cole Porter song, "Anything Goes." Nowhere in scripture does Jesus excuse sin.
- We shouldn't be judgmental, but what about Jesus? Does He judge?
- **John 5:22 (ESV) — 22** For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, [then in verse 24] **24** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
- We were born under judgment; Jesus came to give us mercy.
- Let's give Lisa the benefit of the doubt. Maybe she wasn't saying Jesus is all love and no judgment. Maybe she was talking about being judgmental.
- During that program they also read **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) — 6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his

shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- Sadly, most people don't embrace that wonderful prophecy.
- He is our Wonderful Counselor but most reject His counsel in scripture.
- He is Mighty God and Everlasting Father but most reject His authority.
- He is Prince of Peace but we can't experience peace with others unless we first have peace with God by trusting in His Son, Jesus as Lord.
- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Is judgment a part of the Christmas story? What about condemnation?
- Because of what happened in the Garden of Eden (original sin,) judgment and condemnation are the problem and the Christmas story presents God's solution to that problem.
- I was thinking about all those great Christmas carols we love to sing. What if we really MEANT those words we sing?

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
[How should we respond to this good news?]
Fall on your knees*

*Glory to God all glory in the highest
Oh come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord*
[What would the world be like if we give Him glory and adore Him as Lord?]

King of Kings and Lord of Lords
[How would we live if we believed that is Who He is?]

- Judgment and condemnation are the problem. God gave us the Christ-child in the manger as His solution to that problem.
- This Christmas season is a wonderful opportunity to share that good news to a weary world that needs hope.

ⁱ Explore the Bible Leader's Guide - Lifeway

ⁱⁱ Explore the Bible Quick Source Guide – Lifeway p. 22