

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **“I Gave Them Statutes That Were Not Good” (Ezekiel 20:25-26)**

In Ezekiel 20:25, God said that he gave Israel “statutes that were not good.” In the next verse, he states that he “defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn.” What were these “not good” statutes, and what do they have to do with sacrificing the firstborn? Are these verses evidence that God commanded child sacrifice, as some have suggested? In this teaching, we will seek to determine what exactly is meant by God’s statement that he gave Israel “statutes that were not good.”

Let’s establish some context. In Ezekiel 20, during the Babylonian exile, the prophet Ezekiel receives a word from YHWH confronting the elders of Israel (Ezekiel 20:1-4). This divine speech retells the history of Israel’s disobedience to God, which is divided into four parts: their rebellion in Egypt (20:5-10), their rebellion in the wilderness (20:11-17), their children’s rebellion in the wilderness (20:18-26), and their rebellion after they settled in the land (20:27-29). Israel repeatedly went after idols and rejected God’s laws and Sabbaths. Nevertheless, for the sake of his name, YHWH continued to forgive Israel. After recounting Israel’s history of disobedience, the exiles in Babylon are also condemned for rebelling in the same ways as their ancestors (20:30-32). However, the divine speech concludes with a promise that God will bring them back to the land and purify them (20:33-44).

The verses about God’s “not good” statutes are found in his account of the second generation of Israelites’ rebellion in the wilderness. Here is what those verses say:

#### **Ezekiel 20:25-26**

*Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD [YHWH].*

So, what were these statutes that were not good? And what does it mean when YHWH speaks of defiling the Israelites through their offering up of their firstborn? Some have suggested that YHWH had, at one point, commanded Israel to sacrifice their firstborn children to him. They say that these child sacrifice laws were the “not good” statutes that Ezekiel is talking about, and that the Torah’s commands concerning the *redemption* of the firstborn (Exodus 13:2, 12-13, 15; 22:29; 34:19-20) must have replaced these earlier laws about sacrificing children. Francesca Stavrakopoulou makes this argument in

her book, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*:

The combination of the explicit references to the first-birth of the womb, YHWH's decrees and laws, and the use of sacrificial language shared with the firstborn laws, renders it likely that the book of Ezekiel here refers specifically to laws requiring the sacrifice of the firstborn, laws perhaps reflected in the traditions of the Pentateuch.

—Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2004), 184.

Dan McClellan is another scholar who has promoted this perspective:

I would argue one of the reasons that it became so popular to understand [Molech] as a reference to a deity who was the recipient of those child sacrifices is because it effectively masked the likely original intended recipient of those sacrifices on the part of Israelites, namely the God of Israel. And we see this commanded in Exodus 22:29, but that commandment would later be renegotiated either to understand it as a reference to handing over firstborn sons to priestly service or to require the redemption of the child by using an animal as a proxy. **But we can see other authors acknowledging that original intended purpose of that commandment in, for instance, Ezekiel 20:25-26, where Ezekiel acknowledges that God commanded Israel to sacrifice their children,** but did so as a means of desolating Israel.

—Dan McClellan, “There Was No Deity Named Molech,” *YouTube*, Nov. 27, 2022.

Could it really be true that the Torah originally commanded people to make child sacrifices? Is that what Ezekiel is referring to? Actually no. The data does not support the interpretation offered by people like Stavrakopoulou and McClellan. Two points can be made to demonstrate this.

First of all, Ezekiel himself forcefully condemns child sacrifice (Ezekiel 16:20-21, 36; 20:31; 23:39). This is not what we would expect if Ezekiel believed God required child sacrifice in his law. As Kelvin Friebel notes:

Thus the statement in [Ezekiel] 20:26, if understood as Yahweh decreeing child sacrifice, seems to be out of synch [sic] with the other pronouncements regarding child sacrifice in the book.

—Kelvin G. Friebel, “The Decrees of Yahweh That Are ‘Not Good’: Ezekiel 20:25-26,” *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays offered to honor Michael V. Fox on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 22.

Second, Ezekiel makes a sharp distinction between God's laws in the Torah that God expected his people to keep, and these “not good” statutes in verse 25. Consider this verse from earlier in the chapter:

#### **Ezekiel 20:11**

I gave them **my statutes** and made known to them **my rules**, by which, **if a person does them, he shall live.**

Here, earlier in the chapter, God says that he gave Israel his statutes that he expected them to obey. We might think that these are the same statutes that are mentioned in verse 25, the statutes that were “not good.” But Ezekiel makes it very clear that the “statutes” mentioned in verse 11 are not the same as the “statutes” mentioned in verse 25. He makes this distinction in three critical ways.

First, Ezekiel says that God’s laws given at Sinai are life-giving (Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21; see also 18:9, 17, 21, 28; 33:15). But the statutes referenced in verse 25 are said not to give life. Additionally, when Ezekiel mentions “statutes” in verse 11, he uses the normal Hebrew form for the word, which is the feminine plural form (הַקְּוֹת). However, in verse 25, when referring to the “statutes that are not good,” he uses the masculine plural form (הַקְּוִים). So, he differentiates between these statutes by the way the word “statutes” is spelled in Hebrew. Finally, throughout this chapter, God refers to his laws as “my statutes” and “my rules” (Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24). But God does not say “my statutes” when he refers to the “not good” statutes in verse 25. He just calls them “statutes.” These differences indicate that, in this chapter, Ezekiel is making a distinction between the commands given by God at Sinai and the “not good” statutes from verse 25. In other words, the statutes from verse 25 are not rules that God gave his people to obey. As Friebel writes:

In v. 25, the grammatical deviation of the masculine plural coupled with the variant of no possessive pronoun attached to the nouns seem to be ways of literarily distinguishing the “decrees” and “judgments” of v. 25 from the “statutes” and “ordinances” of the divine covenantal law spoken of elsewhere in the chapter... These contrasts, which occur within the same literary unit, suggest that v. 25 is referring to declarations by Yahweh other than the covenant obligations formerly referenced.

—Kelvin G. Friebel, “The Decrees of Yahweh That Are ‘Not Good’: Ezekiel 20:25-26,” *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays offered to honor Michael V. Fox on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 29.

But this raises the question: if the “statutes” and “rules” mentioned in verse 25 are not God’s laws given at Sinai, then what else could they be referring to?

## What Are the “Not Good” Statutes?

One popular suggestion is that the statutes and rules referred to in verse 25 could be the laws of foreign nations, to which God would send Israel into exile. During their exile, the people would be subject to the laws of these nations, which were oppressive and “not good.” Right before these verses, God does mention how he promised to scatter Israel among the nations for disobeying his laws:

### **Ezekiel 20:23-24**

Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers’ idols.

So, the “not good” statutes are not God’s laws but rather the pagan nations’ laws. The Israelites were subject to the bad laws of these nations because God scattered them. So, in a sense, God “gave” them these bad laws. Or so the argument goes.

This proposal is on the right track, but there is a problem. Verses 25-26 are part of the divine speech retelling the history of Israel’s disobedience. These verses speak of the rebellion of the second

generation of Israelites in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:18-26), which occurred long before Israel was taken into exile by foreign nations. So, these “not good” statutes must have been something given to the second-generation Israelites in the wilderness; they could not be the laws of the nations that Israel was exiled to later.

Nevertheless, the key to unlocking the meaning of this passage is in the previous verses. As we have seen, in verse 23, YHWH declared to scatter Israel among the nations as judgment for their rejection of his laws. Notice the structural connection between verses 23-24 and verses 25-26. Both begin with “moreover I” (גַּם אֲנִי). So, the “not good” statutes in verse 25 are referring to this declaration from YHWH in verse 23. In other words, YHWH declares judgment on Israel for their disobedience, and this judgment is what is “not good” in verse 25. As Friebel notes:

As a resumptive repetition, v. 25 would refer to that specific oath of judgment [in v. 23]. Clearly that decree of judgment in v. 23 is not to the people’s benefit—in other words, it is not good. Rather it is essentially a declaration of death for the nation—in other words, it is not life-giving. Understanding v. 25 as referring to the new declarations of judgment in v. 23, rather than to Yahweh’s covenantal statutes and ordinances, would thus explain the variation in using the masculine-plural חֻקִים as opposed to the feminine-plural חֻקֹת.

—Kelvin G. Friebel, “The Decrees of Yahweh That Are ‘Not Good’: Ezekiel 20:25-26,” *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays offered to honor Michael V. Fox on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 29-30.

So, the “not good” statutes in verse 25 refer back to God’s decree of judgment declared in verse 23. It is a decree of death, not life, because Israel has rejected God’s commandments. That is to say, the “not good” statutes of Ezekiel 20:25 are not God’s laws but instead God’s decrees of judgment upon Israel for breaking his laws.

This interpretation makes sense within the context of Ezekiel’s retelling of Israel’s history. God did warn the second generation of Israelites in the wilderness that if they rejected his commandments, it would result in death, and they would be scattered among the nations:

#### **Deuteronomy 28:64**

And the LORD [YHWH] will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

(Also see Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

It should also be noted that the word for “rules” (משפטים) in Ezekiel 20:25 is used elsewhere in Ezekiel to refer to “judgment” for sin (Ezekiel 5:8), specifically for not obeying God’s “statutes” and “rules”:

#### **Ezekiel 5:7-8**

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD [YHWH]: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules [משפטים], and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, therefore thus says the Lord GOD [YHWH]: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments [משפטים] in your midst in the sight of the nations.

Notice the similarities between this passage and chapter 20. God announces judgments—*mishpatim*—upon Israel for their failure to obey his *mishpatim* and *chukot*, “rules” and “statutes.” Here, like in chapter 20, the *mishpatim* mentioned in verse 8 are not the same thing as God’s *mishpatim* mentioned earlier in the passage. Instead, like in chapter 20, *mishpatim* in Ezekiel 5:8 refers to God’s judgments upon Israel for breaking his “rules.” This parallel in Ezekiel chapter 5 provides further support for seeing “statutes” and “rules” in Ezekiel 20:25 as distinguished from the “statutes” and “rules” mentioned earlier in the chapter. Again, the “statutes” and “rules” in Ezekiel 20:25 seem to refer to God’s decrees of judgment upon Israel for their disobedience.

Friebel provides a nice summary:

Thus it is appropriate in v. 25 for חקים and משפטים to be understood, not as statutes and ordinances that Yahweh had given for the people to follow—that is, the Sinai law—but, rather, the newer decrees of punishment that Yahweh had declared would come upon the people due to their disobedience.

—Kelvin G. Friebel, “The Decrees of Yahweh That Are ‘Not Good’: Ezekiel 20:25-26,” *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays offered to honor Michael V. Fox on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 30.

So, the “not good” statutes from verse 25 were not laws that God expected his people to keep, but rather negative judgments that God declared over his people for breaking his laws. In verse 25, Ezekiel was not saying that God ever commanded his people to do bad things like sacrifice their children. He was saying that God issued harsh and negative judgments upon the people because of their sins.

But what about the next verse, verse 26, which references child sacrifice? How does this fit with what we’ve established so far?

## Offering Up Their Firstborn

### Ezekiel 20:26

and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD [YHWH].

First, let’s consider the phrase “I [that is, YHWH] defiled them.” The ESV translation is misleading here. YHWH is not actively causing Israel to be defiled through their sacrifices. Rather, he is pronouncing them defiled because of what they have done. This is similar to when a priest declared someone ritually defiled in the Torah:

### Leviticus 13:8

And the priest shall look, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous disease.

(Also see Leviticus 13:3, 11, 15, 20, 22, 25, 27, 30, 44)

In Ezekiel 20:26, God does not defile Israel himself; rather, he pronounces Israel defiled because of what *they* have done. So, what *have* they done? They have offered up their firstborn in sacrifice. Here is how the NET renders this verse:

### **Ezekiel 20:26 (NET)**

I declared them to be defiled because of their sacrifices—they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire—so that I might devastate them, so that they would know that I am the LORD [YHWH].

This raises the question: to whom were the Israelites sacrificing their firstborn children? As we noted, some have suggested that they were sacrificing their children to YHWH. However, this does not fit the context. Throughout this chapter, God condemns Israel for “defiling” themselves with idols (Ezekiel 20:7, 18, 30-31). Everywhere else the word “defile” appears in this chapter, it is used in reference to worshiping idols. God’s primary criticism throughout this entire speech is Israel’s idolatry (Ezekiel 20:7-8, 16, 18, 24, 28-32, 39). Also, note the parallel a few verses later:

### **Ezekiel 20:31**

When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, **you defile yourselves with all your idols** to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD [YHWH], I will not be inquired of by you.

(Also see Ezekiel 16:20-21, 36; 23:37, 39)

We see in verse 31 that the practice of offering up children in fire is part of worshiping idols, and that this practice defiles Israel. So, in verse 26, when Ezekiel states that God declares Israel defiled because of their child sacrifice, he must be referring to sacrificing their children to idols, not sacrificing their children to YHWH.

Thus, in Ezekiel 20:26, God says that he had pronounced Israel defiled due to their idolatry, in particular, their sacrificing their children to idols. Apparently, some Israelites among the second generation in the wilderness had engaged in this idolatrous practice, despite God’s explicit prohibitions against child sacrifice in the Torah (Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10).

So, why did God give Israel these “not good” statutes—that is, these decrees of judgment for rebellion? Why did God pronounce the idol worshipers defiled? He did this to “devastate” Israel—that is, to cause them to be horrified or appalled (cf. Ezekiel 32:10)—so that they would acknowledge YHWH. Ezekiel 20:25-26 does not say that God commanded child sacrifice. It says that he decreed judgment upon Israel and pronounced them defiled *because* they sacrificed their children to idols.

Friebel provides an excellent paraphrase of this passage in light of what we have learned:

And also I gave them decrees [regarding their dispersion and scattering] that were not good and judgments [of punishment] by which they would not have life. And I declared them defiled on account of their gifts [to their idols], on account of offering [by fire to idols] all [their] firstborn, so that I would cause them to be horrified, so that they would know that I am Yahweh.

—Kelvin G. Friebel, “The Decrees of Yahweh That Are ‘Not Good’: Ezekiel 20:25-26,” *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays offered to honor Michael V. Fox on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 35.

## Answering Objections

Before we conclude, an objection has been raised that should be addressed. Throughout this teaching, we have referenced Dr. Kelvin Friebel's paper in support of our view that Ezekiel 20:25 pertains to YHWH's declarations of judgment. Dan McClellan, who understands this verse to be referring to old laws instructing Israel to sacrifice their children to YHWH, has objected to Friebel's argument based on verse 18. Let's read the verse, and then we'll consider McClellan's objection.

### Ezekiel 20:18

And I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the **statutes** of your fathers, nor keep their **rules**, nor defile yourselves with their idols.

Here is what McClellan says:

The biggest problem with [Friebel's] argument is we do not have to go outside Ezekiel 20 to find the parallel to our masculine plural reference to legislation by which Israelites could not live. We just have to go to verse 18. Because we have in verse 18 *chukim* in the masculine plural and *mishpatim* also in the masculine plural. And this is a reference to the laws of the Israelites' fathers and ancestors, and it says that they defiled themselves by those laws. And so, these were laws that came before the law that was given at Sinai. And so, we have the same idea of *chukim* and *mishpatim* that were a means of defiling Israel in verse 25. The parallels are very clear. And so, the rhetorical force of 25 and 26 is not, "I am going to decree that you're going into exile"...The idea is, "you used to live by your ancestors' statutes and commandments, not from me, but from the world around them, and that caused them to worship other gods, and that caused them to sacrifice their children, and that caused them to defile themselves. Then I gave you my statutes and commandments by which you were going to be able to live, and you have been disobeying me. And so, what I'm going to do is give you those statues and commandments from before by which you can't live. And I am going to defile you. So basically, that law that I gave you, I'm going to slap another layer onto it, and it's going to be legislation that your ancestors followed, basically requiring you to sacrifice your children. And that is how I am going to defile you, and that's how you're not going to be able to live, and that's how I'm going to show you who's boss." So, [Friebel's] article...overlooks the clearest and the closest parallel to what's going on in verse 25 in favor of going outside of the chapter...And that's because it's motivated by a dogma to avoid the plain meaning of the text, that Ezekiel is having God say, "I commanded Israel to sacrifice their own children," which is the plain reading of Exodus 22:29.

—Dan McClellan, "Responding to Concerns with My Position on Ezekiel 20:25-26," *YouTube*, July 16, 2023.

So, McClellan correctly points out that Ezekiel 20:18 references the statutes and rules of Israel's fathers and, like verse 25, in the Hebrew, these words appear in the masculine plural. However, McClellan *incorrectly* states that Friebel's paper overlooks this point. In reality, Friebel cites this exact verse as evidence for *his* interpretation. Friebel notes that whenever the unusual masculine plural form of "statutes" is used in this chapter, it is in a place that is not referring to God's commandments, including in verse 18. And this is Friebel's exact point concerning verse 25: that the statutes that are "not good" are not God's commandments. As Friebel writes:

A deviation from the stereotypical coordination of these two terms is also noticeable in v. 18 (אבותיכם חוקי 'the decrees of your fathers' and משפטיהם 'their judgments'), **which is the only**

**other occurrence of the masculine plural (הקיים) in the chapter.** In v. 18, the variance draws attention to the contrast between the inappropriate teachings that were formulated and followed by their ancestors as opposed to the divine stipulations of Yahweh...within the specific context of chap. 20 there does seem to be a differentiation between the referents of the masculine plural and the feminine plural forms, **as evidenced from the different connotation of the masculine plural in v. 18.** In v. 25, the grammatical deviation of the masculine plural coupled with the variant of no possessive pronoun attached to the nouns seem to be ways of literarily distinguishing the “decrees” and “judgments” of v. 25 from the “statutes” and “ordinances” of the divine covenantal law spoken of elsewhere in the chapter.

—Kelvin G. Friebe, “The Decrees of Yahweh That Are ‘Not Good’: Ezekiel 20:25-26,” *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays offered to honor Michael V. Fox on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 29.

So, in contrast to the commands of YHWH referenced throughout the chapter in the feminine plural, verse 18 uses the masculine plural form to refer to the rebellious ways of Israel’s ancestors. This suggests that verse 25, which likewise uses the masculine plural form of these words, *also* does not refer to the commands of YHWH. Ezekiel deliberately makes a distinction between God’s life-giving laws that he wants his people to obey and things that are not God’s laws.

In any case, McClellan’s argument is basically that verse 18 informs how we should interpret the “statutes” and “rules” of verse 25. Verse 18 says that Israel’s ancestors turned away from God. Instead of following the life-giving commands that YHWH gave them (Ezekiel 20:11-12), they rebelled against God’s commands and started following *their own* “statues” and “rules” (Ezekiel 20:18). And McClellan argues that, since the next generation of Israel continued to rebel, God gave them those same wicked statues and rules, which included child sacrifice. And why did God do this? Basically, according to McClellan, it was to bully them, to “show them who’s boss.” McClellan insists that this is the “plain reading of the text.”

But is that really the plain reading of the text? No, it is not. McClellan is reading his own dogma *into* the text. He is trying to force Ezekiel 20:25 to support his theory, rather than letting the text speak for itself. Throughout Ezekiel 20, God is condemning the Israelites for disobeying him. Verse 23 says that he swore to scatter them among the nations, and verse 25 says that he gave them statutes that were not good. The natural flow of the text makes it clear that verse 25 refers back to the decree of judgment mentioned two verses earlier. And this is even more obvious in the Hebrew. As we noted earlier, there is a structural connection between verses 23-24 and verses 25-26. Both begin with “moreover I” (גם אני). This repetition is a literary device that signifies a continuation of the subject introduced in verse 23, where YHWH vows to exile the people.

The plain reading of the text is that the way God “devastated” the Israelites and showed them that he is YHWH (Ezekiel 20:26) was by allowing Babylon to destroy them and take them into exile (Ezekiel 20:23). Remember, Ezekiel gave this prophecy when he was in exile in Babylon. Ezekiel was experiencing firsthand the devastation that God brought upon Israel for their disobedience. He wasn’t talking about some imaginary commands about child sacrifice that are never mentioned anywhere else in the Scriptures. He was talking about the punishment that both he and Israel were enduring at the time of this prophecy. This is evident throughout chapter 20, but especially when you consider that verse 23 declares that Israel is being punished with exile, and verse 34 declares that this same punishment will be removed. It says, “**I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out from the countries where you are scattered**” (Ezekiel 20:34). It does not say, “I will stop commanding you to sacrifice your



children.” When you simply read the text, it is pretty “plain” that God’s punishment upon Israel for their disobedience *was exile*, not the imposition of human sacrifice rituals.

However, McClellan completely ignores the context and consistent theme of Ezekiel 20. Instead of just reading the text of Ezekiel for what it says, McClellan *leaves* Ezekiel altogether to try to find support for his theory. He turns to Exodus 22:29 and assumes, for no reason, that this verse was written prior to all the other passages in Exodus that explain what it means to give the firstborn to YHWH. His theory that YHWH, at one time, commanded child sacrifice, relies solely on this single verse, and he completely disregards all other verses in Exodus that clearly explain the actual meaning of the commandment (Exodus 12:12-13, 29-30; 13:1-2, 11-15; 34:20; cf. Numbers 18:15-16). Then, McClellan takes his interpretation of Exodus 22:29 and reads it *into Ezekiel 20:25!* Setting aside McClellan’s completely unreasonable interpretation of Exodus 22:29, which we will cover in another video, to just read this idea into Ezekiel 20:25 while disregarding the immediate context is not careful exegesis of the text.

A second problem with McClellan’s argument is that it makes no sense. Throughout the chapter, God is complaining about Israel disobeying him and defiling themselves, which included sacrificing their children (Ezekiel 20:31). So as a punishment, God gives them bad commandments to sacrifice their children? If God wanted Israel to stop defiling themselves, why would he give them commandments that would cause them to defile themselves more? And why would Israel want to obey God if their obedience brought destruction upon them? Whether they obeyed or disobeyed, the result would be the same. McClellan might be fine with these logical problems his interpretation creates, but if we take the text seriously, his interpretation is simply untenable.

A third problem with McClellan’s argument is that it is completely inconsistent with the rest of Ezekiel. Ezekiel portrays God as someone who wants his people to be righteous and live. Ezekiel chapter 18 says that God wants the wicked to repent and live; God does not want to say, “I told you so” and punish them for their sins (Ezekiel 18:21-23). Chapter 20 says much the same thing; that as much as Israel will know that “he is YHWH” when he does punish them for their sins (Ezekiel 20:26), they will *really* know that he is YHWH when he shows mercy upon them:

#### **Ezekiel 20:44**

*And you shall know that I am the LORD [YHWH], when I deal with you for my name’s sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD [YHWH].*

Does that sound like a God who would command his people to kill their own children so that they would become wicked and he could have more opportunity to punish them? Does that sound like someone who wants to bully his people and put them into no-win situations? McClellan’s interpretation presents an inconsistent and inaccurate picture of who Ezekiel says YHWH is.

Again, McClellan might be fine with these inconsistencies, but when we take the text seriously for what it “plainly” says, Ezekiel simply provides no textual support for McClellan’s theory. To avoid the plain meaning of the text, he takes a bad interpretation of Exodus 22:29 and tries to force it into Ezekiel 20:25, destroying the natural flow of the text and creating all sorts of logical and textual inconsistencies.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Ezekiel 20:25-26 states that God gave Israel “statutes that were not good.” Some have

taken this to mean that God commanded child sacrifice. However, this proposal is not supported by the evidence. Ezekiel himself condemns child sacrifice. Furthermore, Ezekiel distinguishes God's laws in the Torah from these "not good" statutes in verse 25. The "not good" statutes and the "rules" that could not produce life are better understood as God's decrees of judgment upon Israel for their disobedience. In verse 26, the Israelites are not said to have been sacrificing their children to YHWH but rather to idols, as the rest of the chapter makes clear. Ezekiel 20:25-26 does not indicate that God ever commanded his people to sacrifice their children to him.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.*

*Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!*

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**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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