

Ezekiel Chapter 18

One of the foundational principles of Scripture is presented in this chapter.

Also taught in Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6.

Judgment is according to individual faith and conduct.

He had foretold national punishment, but the reason was individual sin.

Ezekiel 18:1-2 "The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying," "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?"

Again, we have a totally new prophecy beginning here.

It seems, some of the younger men had been complaining that they had not sinned, and yet, they were suffering for the sins of their fathers.

Though they were themselves wicked and idolatrous, they blamed their forefathers for their state.

The rationalizing is expressed in a current proverb (Jer. 31:29), which means in effect, "They sinned "eaten ate sour grapes"; and thereby inherit the bitterness" (teeth set on edge).

This evidently was a well known proverb.

The point of it is that children suffer for their parents' sins.

However, this proverb was not true in the case of Israel, and the LORD tells them that they may not use the proverb anymore.

Evidently the people thought they were suffering unjustly for their ancestors' sins.

Though there is an element of truth in the statement that the children suffer as a consequence of the parents sins, it could not be applied here.

The proverb was being used as a lame excuse for their own sinful condition.

Rather, the LORD says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die.

The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father (v.20).

Ezekiel thus preserves in proper balance the tragic consequences of sin and the principle of individual accountability.

Ezekiel 18:3 "[As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have [occasion] any more to use this proverb in Israel."

This statement they had been making about God visiting the sins of the father on the son was misunderstood.

God would no longer let them make this statement.

God rejected their blame shifting and evasion of responsibility.

From now on, each person would be judged separately.

Even today, in a sense, the bad reputation of the father will bring hardships on his children.

This cannot be helped.

In God's sight, however, each person is responsible for his own sin.

Ezekiel 18:4 "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

The penalty for sin is death.

That is why it was necessary for the body of Jesus to die on the cross.

He paid our penalty of death for us.

He became our substitute.

Our bill for our sin is marked paid in full (if we are Christians).

Each person is responsible for his own sin.

God played no favorites, but was fair in holding each individual accountable for his own sin.

The death is physical death which, for many, results in eternal death.

We all belong to God, in the fact that He created us.

We are saved, or condemned, one at a time, not in a group.

God may save the multitude, but He saves them one at a time.

Verses 5-18

Two scenarios are proposed to clarify the matter of personal guilt:

- (1) A just father of an unjust son (verses 14-18); and
- (2) An unjust father of a just son (verses 14-18).

Ezekiel 18:5 "But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,"

This is the beginning of the explanation of the character of a just man.

The definition of “just” or righteous is given in specifics (in verses 6-9).

Such behavior could only characterize a genuine believer who was “faithful” from the heart.

Ezekiel 18:6 "[And] hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbor's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,"

These were all forbidden in the law of God.

"Eating on the mountain" is speaking of breaking bread in the presence of a false god.

The remnant of Jews that God saved, were made up of those who had not bowed their knees to a false god.

We see also, that there must be great respect shown for the neighbor and his wife.

Adultery is spoken of in all instances here.

The man spoken of had not committed physical adultery, or spiritual adultery.

Ezekiel 18:7 "And hath not oppressed any, [but] hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;"

Jesus covered this, when He said (in Luke):

Luke 6:31 "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

This person is good to his fellow man, knowing that it was as if he had done these things unto the LORD.

Ezekiel 18:8 "He [that] hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, [that] hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,"

This man does not take advantage of his brother in trouble.

He tells the truth at all times, and is no respecter of persons.

Usury refers to interest on loans.

Ezekiel 18:9 "Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he [is] just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD."

He is obedient to God.

He is fair with God and man.

He has kept the two commandments Jesus would speak of as covering them all.

The righteous do die physically for many reasons that do not contradict this principle, such as old age, martyrdom, or death in battle.

While there are exceptions to “surely live” as to temporal life and sometimes the ungodly survive, unlike (18:13), there can be absolutely no exceptions in God’s ultimate spiritual reckoning.

In every case, the just die to live eternally and the unjust, which never possessed spiritual life, shall perish physically and eternally.

The just will live no matter what the character of his parents or children.

Ezekiel 18:10 "If he beget a son [that is] a robber, a shedder of blood, and [that] doeth the like to [any] one of these [things],"

It would be hard to believe that such a righteous man would have a son who was a robber, or a shedder of blood, but sometimes it happens.

Could such a sinful son claim the merits of his father’s righteousness and live?

No!

Each person is responsible for his own personal sin.

Ezekiel 18:11 "And that doeth not any of those [duties], but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbor’s wife,"

Here we see an evil son who worships false gods in the high places, and commits adultery with the neighbor's wife.

Ezekiel 18:12 "Hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination,"

This evil son has no regard for the needs of others, and takes advantage of them every time he can.

Ezekiel 18:13 "Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him."

When those in need come to him to borrow money, he gets them in even more trouble by charging them double on the interest. "Abominations" are revolting sins in the sight of God.

All of the sins mentioned of the son, are from someone who is living in death.

He will not live.

He has sinned unto death.

His blood is not upon his father, but on himself.

Verses 14-18

This part features an unjust father and a just son to make the same point.

The righteous son shall "surely live" (verse 17).

Ezekiel 18:14 "Now, lo, [if] he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like,"

Now, we see the reverse.

The father is a sinful man in this parable.

In this case, the son sees the sins of the father, and decides not to live like the father.

He decides to do what is right in the sight of God.

Ezekiel 18:15 "[That] hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbor's wife,"

This son has not committed spiritual or physical adultery.

Ezekiel 18:16 "Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, [but] hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment,"

Jesus would be able to say unto him, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these, ye have done it unto me" (see Matt. 25:40).

Ezekiel 18:17 "[That] hath taken off his hand from the poor, [that] hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live."

This person is not worthy of death.

He shall live.

Ezekiel 18:18 "[As for] his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did [that] which [is] not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity."

The father, who had committed these sins, had been judged of God and found guilty.

He will die.

Ezekiel 18:19 "Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, [and] hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live."

Again, this is showing that judgment from God is individual.

Each person will stand before God to be judged.

Each will pay for his own sin, not for someone else's sin.

Ezekiel 18:20 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

A person is responsible for his own sins, and no one else's.

A person who is righteous cannot pass that on to his children any more than he could pass on his sins.

Ezekiel 18:21 "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die."

This is just saying that even someone, who has sinned, can repent of those sins, and be saved.

To "repent" means to turn completely away from your sin, and begin again a clean new life.

Ezekiel 18:22 "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live."

This is speaking of the fact, that sins that are forgiven are not remembered anymore by God.

They are as if they had never happened.

This speaks strongly of the righteousness we receive, when we receive Jesus as our Savior.

We actually give Him our sin, and receive His righteousness in exchange.

Ezekiel 18:23 "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: [and] not that he should return from his ways, and live?"

From Genesis to Revelation in the Bible, God wants man to repent of his sins, and be saved.

In Jesus, God has given mankind a perfect plan, whereby he can be saved.

Every time God poured His wrath out on the people, it was to cause them to repent and turn to God.

God is not willing that even one would be lost and He takes no pleasure in the death of the unrighteous.

Ezekiel 18:24 "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, [and] doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked [man] doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

We find a similar Scripture in Hebrews:

Hebrews 6:4-6 "For [it is] impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," "And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," "If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put [him] to an open shame."

This is not speaking of a person falling and committing one sin.

This is a person who began living for God, but then changed his lifestyle back to the sinful way.

We find in the following Scripture just how bad this is.

2 Peter 2:21 "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known [it], to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

We see then, it is a very serious thing to turn away from God back into the world.

But before you say this is saying one can lose their salvation, this is not what is being said.

In the case of the Jews in the book of Hebrew, this is where they were given the gospel and began to live in the Word, only to turn back to the ways of the Judaizers after listening to the false prophets and teachers.

Their former, apparent righteousness was not genuine and God did not remember it as a valid expression of faith.

I'm going to visit this again (in verse 26), with a slightly different view on this as it applied to Old Testament people.

Verses 25-29

God applied the principle in summary to Israel's sin problem.

They, not He, must acknowledge their lack of equity.

Ezekiel 18:25 "Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?"

What a terrible thing it is to question whether God is fair, or not.

How could they say this?

God is just in all His dealings with mankind.

We all want His mercy, but few of us want His justice.

**Ezekiel 18:26-27 "When a righteous [man] turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die."
"Again, when the wicked [man] turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."**

In the Old Testament, everyone was under the law.

The law was their schoolmaster to guide men as to how to live and serve God.

These Jews were under the Abrahamic Covenant and once a year the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and offer a sacrifice on their behalf for cleansing.

However, that could not remove the sins as only Jesus could do that with His shed blood.

Their sins were only covered and remember this was only done once a year.

At this time, they were not under a once saved always saved covenant as we are today.

Therefore, where the righteous turned to unrighteousness, they were judged harshly as the scripture above states.

Verse 24 description given previously, would apply to the new covenant which is the covenant of Grace.

Ezekiel 18:28 "Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die."

True repentance brings forgiveness and life to the sinner.

Notice in this, a person must walk in the saved condition to inherit eternal life.

Salvation is a day to day walk.

Ezekiel 18:29 "Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?"

Their guilty conscience of their sins has caused them to think God unequal.

They wanted to go ahead, and sin, and still be saved.

That is not the way to get to heaven.

Ezekiel 18:30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn [yourselves] from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."

All of the chastisement that came upon Israel was for the purpose of causing them to repent.

God will not force a person to be saved.

He wants everyone to be saved.

He loves each of us.

We are His creation.

God is love and peace, but He is also Judge.

God does not cause their ruin.

He gives them every chance to repent.

Their unrepentant sins are what bring their ruin.

Ezekiel 18:31 "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

The key to life eternal and triumph over death is conversion.

This involves repentance from sin and receiving the new heart which God gives with a new spirit wrought by the Holy Spirit.

God is trying to say something that will cause them to repent, and start all over again with Him.

This verse above is speaking strongly of the brand new life we receive from Jesus, when we repent and are washed in His blood.

Some people call it being born again of the Spirit.

John 3:5-6 "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

This brand new heart is washed in the blood of the Lamb.

We are what our heart is.

When our heart is pure, we are pure.

It is each person's choice.

We live with God, or we die in sin.

Ezekiel 18:32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn [yourselves], and live ye."

God created us for eternal life.

We are His creation.

We can be His sons.

Ezekiel has preached a beautiful message of repentance and salvation.

Each person must decide for himself.

We must choose.

We can have life, or death.

It is our choice.

The death of His saints is precious to God.

By contrast, He has no such pleasure when a person dies without repentance.

While God is sovereign in salvation, man is responsible for his own sin.

“Turn and live: This was a call to repent and avoid physical and eternal death.

Ezekiel was a preacher of repentance and of God’s offer of mercy to the penitent.

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Ezekiel Chapter 18 Questions

1. What Question does Ezekiel ask them in verse 2?
2. What did the "eaten the sour grapes" symbolize?
3. What did their teeth "were set on edge" symbolize?
4. What would be different about their sins from now on?
5. The penalty for sin is _____.
6. Jesus became our _____ on the cross.
7. Whose bill for their sins is marked paid in full?
8. God may save the multitude, but he saves them _____.
9. What is verse 5 the beginning of an explanation of?
10. Verse 6 is speaking of what sins?
11. How did Jesus express the same thing as in verse 7?
12. Verse 9 says, the man is _____ to God.

13. What two commandments cover everything?
14. Describe the evil son.
15. What happens to the evil son, if he does not repent?
16. Describe the son who lives righteous before God.
17. The father, who is judged of God and found guilty, will _____.
18. Whose sins are you responsible for?
19. What does "repent" mean?
20. What happens to sins that are repented of?
21. Which books of the Bible call for repentance?
22. Why did God pour out His wrath upon them?
23. Where do we find another Scripture similar to Ezekiel 18:24?
24. We all want God's mercy, and not His _____.
25. What are the key words in verse 26?
26. True repentance brings what?
27. What caused them to believe God's ways were not equal?
28. What brings their ruin?
29. God created us for _____ _____.
30. What has Ezekiel done in this chapter?