



Lesson 12 May 22nd, 2021

Ezekiel: Street Preacher to the Exiles

Middle/High School

Study Scripture – Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32

Background Scripture – Ezekiel 18

Key Verse:

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

Ezekiel 18:32

INTRODUCTION

We live in a day when it is common for people to shift blame and attribute their problems to circumstances or society. We read about ‘victimhood’; people see themselves as victims rather than being guilty or responsible. This attitude might be characteristic of our age, but it is not something new.

The sin of refusing to take responsibility for actions has always been a sore point with men, all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We remember that Adam blamed Eve for his sin and in doing so blamed God, for he said that it was God that gave him Eve. Of course, neither did Eve accept any responsibility for her sin but simply said: “*The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*”. The Scriptures however do not absolve men of their responsibility and accountability before God.

As we study it will be helpful for us to bear in mind some of the issues that the Text addresses.

We see:

1. What God wants
2. What pleases God and we learn that even the death of the wicked does not please God.
3. God rejects half-truths and our tendency to pass blame onto others.
4. Our choice is to choose victimhood as a way of life or choosing our destiny.
5. God states emphatically that guilt will lead to punishment.
6. God is open to our repentance.
7. God challenges us to cast away our transgressions.
8. Casting away our transgressions is the first step to transformation.
9. God's aim is to have us possess a new heart and a new mind.

Ezekiel was a priest of Yahweh as well as a prophet of Yahweh in Judah. He was born about 623 B.C and would have grown up in Judah during King Josiah's reforms (622-609 B.C.).

Ezekiel's ministry began 593 B.C. (1:2-3) and the last dated prophecy came in 571 B.C. (29:17).

His entire ministry transpired during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605-562 B.C.).

Ezekiel was carried away to Babylon along with ten thousand people from the elite of Jewish society including King Jehoiachin. The deportation occurred in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24: 10-17) when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah because of the treachery and rebellion. He installed a puppet king named Zedekiah who had a 11-year reign. He had been installed as King by Nebuchadnezzar who had deposed the 18-year-old King Jehoiachin after his three-month reign taking him, Jerusalem's most prominent citizens, as well as "***all the treasures of the house of Yahweh***" (2 Kings 24: 13) into exile in Babylonia. One scholar locates the time of this chapter as follows:

"The events of this chapter takes place between the first and second deportations (597-587 B.C.). Ezekiel's prophecies speak to the unfaithfulness of Zedekiah and the consequences of his ruinous reign. He also brings the word of hope to the exiles, who will one day be restored to the Promised Land".

The trigger for the captivity which occurred in 587 B.C. came when Nebuchadnezzar responded to Zedekiah's rebellion and secret alliance with Babylon's rival Egypt, laid siege and destroyed the city, killed many of its inhabitants, destroyed the Temple, took most of the rest of the people to Babylon leaving behind only the poorest.

The people of God had taken Him for granted. They assumed that His covenant with Abraham and the Patriarchs meant their occupation of the land was permanent and that they were immune to any foreign captivity as long as God was in their midst, evidenced by the Temple in Jerusalem. To their utter shock and great dismay however, Jerusalem was captured, and the nation was exiled from the land to live in captivity in Babylon.

Greater judgment was still to come but this initial deportation did not bring repentance or remorse from the sin-hardened exiles, only disillusionment, cynicism, bitterness, and anger. It is to this disgruntled people that Ezekiel was called to prophesy and his message was not well received. Like Jeremiah, God warned him that the people would not listen to his messages of gloom and doom.

The prophet's message was the same as that brought by the other seers of his time. First was the warning of judgment; the sovereign Lord will not tolerate sin, especially sin in the life of His own people. Ezekiel proclaimed that the Lord was going to bring catastrophic judgment on Jerusalem because of their idolatry. They had deluded themselves with the belief that as long as the Temple remained, God was among them. Ezekiel warned that God had left the Temple as a prelude to judgment. He would also bring judgment through Babylon to the nations that laughed at Jerusalem's fall and oppressed its people. In the end all the nations would know that Yahweh is God.

The prophet ministered '*in the midst*' of the Jewish exiles who settled at Tel-abib (or Tel Aviv) beside the Chebar (or Kebar) River (3:15). This site is where most of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia lived. One of Ezekiel's favorite words was *betok*, 'among' or 'in the midst. It reveals the prophet's perspective of himself as someone living in the midst of a people with a ministry that would impact history for generations to come. Jews lived in three principal locations during Ezekiel's ministry: Egypt, Judah, and Babylon. Ezekiel evidently ministered among the Chebar community entirely; there is no evidence that he ever visited Jerusalem after the Babylonians took him captive.

The Jews were in exile because they had proved unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant that their God had made with them. That covenant warned the Israelites that if they proved unfaithful,



they could expect the divine discipline of their sovereign Lord who might even drive them from the land He had given them (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The covenant also promised restoration to the land eventually. God would not cast His people off permanently no matter how far they departed from Him and His will.

The purpose of the Exile was to turn God's people away from their sins and back to their Sovereign. The discipline they experienced was an evidence of God's love. When it was over, a glorious future lay in store for them. A righteous ruler would eventually lead them back to a radically renovated land where they would enjoy peace, prosperity, and renewed worship. Ezekiel like Jeremiah took a lone stand for the truth, one in Babylon and the other in Jerusalem: they both insisted that the future of Israel lay with the exiles and not with those left behind in Jerusalem. They both rejected the fatalism of those who quoted the proverb about the fathers eating sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge; they both preached against the shepherds of Israel who failed to care for the flock; they both emphasized the principle of individual retribution and the need for individual repentance; they both looked forward to a lengthy exile, followed by a restoration under godly leadership; they both spoke in terms of a new covenant which would be inwardly and personally appropriated; and they both spoke against the false prophets who prophesied peace when there was no peace.

The exiles in Babylon had fastened unto the proverb: *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge"* (18:2) in an attempt to evade personal responsibility (Jeremiah 31: 29). They argued, 'we have not done anything wrong! We can't help it if our forefathers sinned! Why are we punished for the sins of our forefathers?' This contention was nothing more than a veiled accusation of injustice on God's part and a denial of their own culpability. These sinners were trying hard to transfer their guilt to others and the responsibility of bearing the punishment for their own sins. They were apparently trying to comfort themselves with the thought that they were suffering, not for their own sins but for the sins that others had done. In doing so they were ignoring the fact that God was still being merciful to them and rather than righteous, they were wicked.

Of course, this was a denial that they were sinners and a sign that they had hardened their hearts against the punishment of God. With this attitude they would never believe that they had any reason to repent. They were covering their sins and quieting their conscience. The principle that persistent sin would be punished, and obedience rewarded was well known to them. However, to justify themselves, they accepted a delusion and encouraged themselves with this false proverb. (Note that this is not the first proverb that the people used to attack God, Ezekiel 12: 22).

The situation made it necessary for God to justify or vindicate His dealings with them and demonstrate His righteousness and moral government.

The occasion gave rise to the message we are about to study, a message of timeless and universal application. Ezekiel sets down the principle, *"The soul that sins shall die."* Jeremiah had already laid down the rule, *"Everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes – his own teeth will set on edge"* (Jeremiah 31:30). God's own sovereignty and justice is the basis of this principle.

In our Study Ezekiel expands this principle with illustrations from three successive generations. The son is not punished because of his father's sin, nor is he spared from the consequences of his wickedness because of his father's righteousness.



The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him (Ezekiel 18:20).

Ezekiel insists that God is holy, is all-powerful and loves those in covenant with Him. He rejects any idea that there is an unchangeable, cosmic rule of materialistic fatalism, which makes the fate of one generation determined by the actions of the previous generation in a way that this cannot be broken.

The questions arise. Do parents transfer their evil nature, as well as their faults and sinful inclinations to their children and are children punished for the faults and offences of their parents? How far can we go in saying that the moral evil of parents extends to their children? Let us however make one thing clear so that we do not misinterpret what Ezekiel is saying. We must now make clear that this proverb has powerful implications only because it rings true. Many people have mourned because of their parents' limitations and struggled against psychic or physical injury from childhood.

It is clear to all of us that children have suffered because their parents have done wrong things and brought them up in wrong ways. Parents have often made poor choices and these choices have led to death for their children. There certainly are dysfunctional parents and their children are more likely to suffer dysfunction than their peers which come from properly functioning families.

But we should remember that many people from dysfunctional families do not allow their circumstances to hold them back and they lead normal and sometimes exceptionally creative lives, succeeding in dramatic ways. Then we see some children from good families rebel and lead dysfunctional lives. We therefore are looking at something which depends on individual choices.

But nevertheless, children therefore can say on occasion, but life is not often fair to them. As one writer states plainly:

“Do children suffer for the sins of their parents? Absolutely. Have we suffered for the sins of our parents? Absolutely. I have no doubt that my children are suffering-- and will suffer-- for my sins. In this broken world, we are all victims of other people's sins.

Is our fate then irreversibly determined by the sins that have been committed against us? Is there nothing we can do about it? Is there nothing that God is doing about it?

But it is important that we note the specific situation in which the exiles standing before Ezekiel was. There was without doubt a current emergency. There has been a long series of rebellions against Babylon, and it is the current rebellion that now brings the kingdom of Judah to the brink of disaster and ultimate jeopardy. So they bear immediate and personal responsibility. But they are arguing that Nebuchadnezzar's deportations have singled them out as being responsible for the rebellion and its tragedies. They therefore have no intention to acknowledge their own guilt, to therefore repent, and to live. Jeremiah had gone through this with King Zedekiah to no avail.

God therefore had to deal with this matter of intergenerational responsibility which arose from Exodus 34: 7 and David's casual and flippant attempt to dismiss his responsibility for the death of Uriah. See 2 Samuel 11:25. Ezekiel answers all these questions for us and gives the true perspective on God's justice and individual responsibility.



The Babylonian exile created great uncertainty about the people's relationship with God. Could God, who had allowed His holy city to be ravaged and His people carried into exile, still care for the people? If He still cared, could He actually *take* care of them in a foreign land?

THE TEXT

Verse 1. *The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,*

The word of the Lord is a common phrase used in Ezekiel to emphasize that the Lord spoke to His prophet. This phrase occurs dozens of times in this book, far more often than in any other Bible book. Its frequent use in Ezekiel emphasizes that God communicated with His people even in exile. His continuing to speak to Ezekiel was meant in part to reassure the people that God was still with them in a foreign land.

Verse 2. *What mean ye...* this is a question of amazement. The proverb concerned what was happening among the exiles and in Israel; the land was in a state of desolation following the judgments of God. The implication was that the people were being punished because their ancestors had committed sins, that is, their fathers had eaten unripe or sour grapes and as a consequence of these sins, they the children, had to endure suffering. This meant that the children were innocent and had done nothing deserving of the calamity they now had to endure.

... The fathers have eaten sour grapes ... the malicious misrepresentations of God's justice had reached proverbial proportions. God reacted to the iniquitous attitude of both those in Jerusalem and those in exile by instructing Ezekiel to confront the people. Note that Jeremiah in 31:29 also refers to this proverb in the prophet Jeremiah repeats the people's attitude in laments 5:7.

This was another proverb insulting to God that implied they could not trust Him or His promises but instead they were locked in as victims to a rigid law of the universe. The proverb expressed the belief that those in exile (the children) and those still in Judah were unjustly bearing the punishment for the sins of earlier generations (the parents). By claiming that their problem was inherited, the exiles denied responsibility or guilt on their part. This would lead them to charging God with unfairness and injustice. God was certainly not prepared to have them cover their sins, quiet their conscience, and malign His name.

They might have had Texts like Exodus 20:5 in mind and the announcement of the prophets that God would destroy Judah because of the sins of Manasseh, (2 Kings 24: 3; Jeremiah 15: 4). Of course, any interpretation of these Texts suggesting children were being punished for the guilt of their fathers would be a gross distortion of God's words. In any case they held that God could not justly punish them for the sins that the kings before them had committed. It also meant they had ignored Deuteronomy 24: 6 that children were not to be put to death for the sins their fathers, but instead every man would be put to death for his own sins. Their argument would suggest that God is breaking His own commandment.

The danger of this position is much more than we normally might think. If you think that you're being punished for the sins of your parents that belief robs you of hope and tells you that you're doomed irrespective of anything that you might do for there is no way of escape. That is a dangerous position in God refutes it.



Verse 3. ... *ye shall not have occasion any more* This is such an important issue that God introduces His affirmation with an oath so that we know the importance of what He's saying. God says, ***“As I live, says the Lord Yahweh”***.

“You shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel”.

Yahweh therefore forbids the use of this proverb for the people were guilty of willful sin, they were in fact eating sour grapes. This willful sin would produce bitterness, sooner or later. To suggest that they were hurting only because of the evil of their parents and were feeling pain though they had never tasted the pleasures of sin, flew in the face of their well-documented rebellious and abominable behavior. The whole attitude of these unrepentant people resulted from malice and a refusal to humble themselves before God. They had embarked on the perilous path of ‘striving with their Maker’. It seemed by their argument that there was a law designed to hurt them which their Maker had either devised or was powerless to alter. This of course was a direct attack on the nature of God.

The fact that the sins of one generation have consequences for another is not the same as saying that God punishes an innocent group for the sins of a guilty group. The problem shown in today’s Text is that the exiles specifically apply this *proverb* to disavow any culpability for their situation. In so doing, they can claim that God was unjust in His dealings with them. (Ezekiel 18:25–29; 33:17–20).

Ezekiel himself pointed out that the exile was the result of covenant unfaithfulness by many generations of Israelites (Ezekiel 16). God had revealed Himself as the one *“visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation”* (Exodus 20:5). The exiles’ ancestors were indeed guilty (example: 2 Kings 21:1–16). But this generation had been expelled from the Promised Land because of their own sin.

Their position was so offensive that God swore by an oath that they should stop using that proverb.

We should pay close attention to our attitude for we today are similarly fond of talking about intergenerational sins and some go so far as to say that they have the power to do something about this so-called sin, a sin which does not really exist. This of course gives some people power over others.

God would make it clear that the people of Judah were suffering for their own sins and enduring just punishment, by revealing their own evil and the justice of His ways, through His judgments. He would also show that He was merciful to those who repented. The penitents would recognize the truth and would never in future doubt that God’s judgments were just. Verse 4. ... *the soul that sinneth, it shall die* ... this is always God's principle. Exodus 20:5 makes it clear that God only ‘visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth-generation of them that **hate Him**’; that is, the children hating God just as their fathers hated God. Deuteronomy 24:6 also states this principle.

Of critical importance is the fact that God declares ***“behold, all souls (nepes) are mine; as the soul (nepes) of the son is mine”***. One scholar reminds us: ***“Nepes is a word that means breath, the breath that animates the living being-- or the inner being-- or the whole person. It appears frequently in the Old Testament, and is used both for human and animal life (Baker and Carpenter, 746)***

It is important to note that there is a biblical distinction between guilt and consequences. Everyone is personally responsible to God and bears the guilt of their sinfulness. This guilt will



certainly result in the death of the guilty party, the consequences of guilt however can affect others. Before they start blaming God, people should ensure that they are not themselves guilty and are suffering the consequences of their own guilt. Corporate responsibility exists, but God certainly regards those who are innocent but who are affected by the consequences of the evil of others as “not guilty”. He sees them as deserving of His protection, even if this might not be apparent until one is in the ‘life to come’.

One writer speaks to this issue as follows:

“The story of Achan in Joshua 7:1-26 is a classic example of corporate responsibility. Achan sinned, but his whole family suffered for his sin.

Such a passage is difficult to understand unless we see the biblical distinction between guilt and consequences. In Achan's case he was the guilty party (7:21), but his family, who may have shared guilt by remaining silent about his misdeed, shared at least the consequences of his guilt, which was death by stoning.

This was the point made in Exodus 20:5 and 34:6-7. Individually each person is responsible for his or her own guilt of sin.

But we must always be aware that the consequences of sin will affect others who may be innocent of the guilt for that particular sin.

This is true even when the sin is forgiven. God promised to remove the guilt of sin, but most often the consequences remain. David is a good example. Though he was forgiven of his sins of adultery and murder, he still suffered the consequences (2 Sam. 12:11-20).

So we should be careful of how we live, for we might be guilty of sins and because of our position in the family or in the community, we put others who are not guilty in a position where they are affected by the consequences. Note however that in the case of Israel and Judah they did not repent of the sins of Manasseh and Judah despite the extensive efforts of Josiah. Their apparent repentance was only superficial.

God has the right to declare that *the soul that sinneth, it shall die*. Each person is responsible to God for his or her own sin and God will deal with each person individually. In giving the Israelites His law, God commanded that *“fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin”* (Deuteronomy 24:16).

But note carefully that though God declares emphatically ownership over all life God is not using such a declaration to justify His right to kill the wicked.

God makes it quite clear emphatically that He has no pleasure in the death of anyone, even sinners. So this raises the question as to what sinners are to do since God does not desire their death. God is leading them somewhere by His argument. God's basic position is that He values life above all else and is therefore open to human repentance and change instead of human beings being engaged in an endless cycle of suffering by their encouraging themselves to remain in old patterns of guilt and blame.

In the following verses, God illustrates the principle that children would die for their own sins and not for their parent's sins by discussing three cases. In verses 5-9 we see a father doing right, in verses 10-13 his son does evil, and in verses 14 to 18 his grandson is doing right. This would of course bring to mind the sequence of Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah.

In these examples the focus is not on what's being done to any of the individuals but rather on what the individuals do to themselves regardless of what's been done to them.



Note there is a subtle change in God simply speaking of “a wicked person” and “a righteous person”. No matter what happens there is hope if one turns from their ways and practices and follow the way of righteousness.

The first case showed a righteous father, not a perfect man, who had ‘life’ because he had not sinned. The response to the Lord was appropriate and his behaviour shows its orientation to God by his doing what is “just and right”. The choice is between life and death.

The second case concerned the wicked son of a righteous father. The wicked son did all kind of wickedness in multiple ways even though the father did nothing like that. The son did not learn wickedness from his father and therefore unlike the father he bore the responsibility for his own death, since the righteousness of his father could not benefit him. His blood would be on his own head which means that the father would not share in the guilt of the son.

In the third case there was a wicked father, but his son saw the evil of his father and rejected his father's behavior. This son lived and did not suffer because of the sins of his father. It might seem strange that this son who grew up in a dysfunction home did not take on a dysfunctional way of life but chose a different path from his father. As a matter of fact the description of this son is so detailed that the emphasis seems to be that this son saw what his father had done and therefore made a choice based on his father's choices to choose otherwise.

So, what has been done to you? Don't minimize anything or sugarcoat anything or excuse anything. The focus is what you should do regardless of what has been done to you.

Verses 5. This verse sets up the first conclusion of three detail filled case studies. The second and third, are in Ezekiel 18:10–17. For the hypothetical *man* introduced here to be *just* is another parallel way of saying that he does *that which is lawful and right*. It's interesting to note how rare it is for the Hebrew words translated “just,” “lawful,” and “right” to occur in the same verse; the only other place is Jeremiah 23:5; specifics follow.

... *But if a man be just, ...* The prophet discusses the first case where a man obeys the laws of God and keeps himself from evil. He knows that God is a jealous God and the only one to be worshipped. So, he does not offer his sacrifices in places where images or false representations of God exist. He avoids idolatry in all forms and does not observe pagan, sacrificial festivals. He eschews and disavows any trace of idols, such as looking at them, trusting in them, offering any prayers or supplications to them, does not kneel at their altars, or attend their worship or their feasts held in their ‘*high places*’. The just man behaves morally, keeping himself from any acts of sexual uncleanness. Some of the sins are listed in the second, seventh and eighth commandments.

Verse 6. Eating *upon the mountains* refers to participation in idolatrous cult practices that were common in the mountain regions (2 Kings 23:1–8; contrast 21:1–3). These high places featured altars, often dedicated to the worship of Canaanite deities such as Baal. To look *to the idols of Israel* was to worship and seek help from false gods or to make an image of the true God for worship.

Proper love for God begins with worshipping no other gods (Exodus 20:3–6). The righteous person did not turn to false gods for assistance. He or she remained dependent on God alone for health and protection.

The exiles were hundreds of miles away from the high places of their fathers’ idols. But the exiles were surrounded by the countless deities of the Babylonians. The temptation of straying



to other gods remained real, especially when the exiles considered their uncertainty regarding God's continuing care.

Neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, ... the just man was careful to stay morally pure. The Law of Moses prohibited not only adultery (Exodus 20:14) but also intercourse during a woman's menstrual period (Leviticus 15:19–33; 18:19). The penalty for violation of the latter was that *"both of them shall be cut off from among their people"* (20:18). Some suggest that the reason for this restriction was because of the special role of blood in atoning for sins, respecting certain rights of women, or to maintain ceremonial purity. Whatever the reason, the righteous man observed this statute as well.

Verses 7. The righteous man also exhibits godly love toward others. Righteousness consists of more than merely doing no harm. A just person uses his or her resources to provide for the material needs of others (James 2:15–16). These examples are all forms of economic righteousness shown to *the debtor* and *the hungry* and *the naked*. These are representative of other needy neighbors as well. Love is an act!

Verse 8. *He that hath not given forth upon usury...* he does not violate any laws governing business relationships and does not commit fraud, oppress others, or forcibly take peoples goods, properties, liberties, or their life. So he demonstrates love for his people in social and spiritual matters. In so doing he literally *"withdraws his hand from all he perceives to be iniquity"*, so that he would not sin even inadvertently. He does justice on every occasion and that is his guiding principle in life. He is charitable and kindhearted and provides food and clothing to those in need. This is true righteousness, and it preserves him from destruction. We note that all the positive and negative actions addressed here are covered in the Law of Moses

(Exodus 20:15; 21:2; 22:21, 26–27; Deuteronomy 15:7–11; 23:19–20). The righteous man never lies about or wrongs a neighbor for any reason, in careful obedience to Deuteronomy 5:20–21. Rather, he keeps his distance from evil and all forms of judicial corruption (16:19). In short, such a man puts God's law above any opportunity to gain at the expense of another.

The economically vulnerable often find themselves in positions where they had no choice but to accept the terms of predatory lenders. God viewed the practice as evidence that His people had forgotten Him (Ezekiel 22:12). He is the protector of the downtrodden and He expected His people to be the same (Psalm 82:3; Proverbs 14:31).

While the wicked took advantage of the poor in various ways, the righteous person in Israel did not charge interest on loans (*usury*) to fellow Israelites. And while interest could be charged to a foreigner, it still had to be restrained (Deuteronomy 23:19–20).

Verse 9. Ezekiel defines righteousness and unrighteousness in concrete terms showing specific examples of righteousness as opposed to wickedness. We are told that the just person who continues in right living would surely live. To be just means to be right in conduct and character and such a person would shun unrighteous conduct. His ways conform to the ways of God and he serves God and stands firm in the love and favor of God.

Here we see *hath walked* is another way of saying *hath kept*. Likewise, God's *statutes* are the same as His *judgments*. The righteous person does not follow the selfish, sinful ways of others in any respect.

...He is just, he shall surely live... God will not judge or punish the *just* person for the sins of others—period. We may note in passing that the capitalization of the phrase *the Lord God*



indicates different Hebrew words than does the capitalization of the phrase “the Lord ... God” as the latter occurs in, for example, Ezekiel 20:5b. There are three single-word Hebrew names for God in the Old Testament: Yahweh, Adonai, and Elohim. The phrases “the Lord God” and “the Lord ... God” indicate different combinations of these names.

Verse 10..... in the second case, should a righteous man have a wicked son, who is violent, sheds blood, commits idolatry, adultery, oppresses the poor, takes away their property and practices usury, this son will not be saved by his father's righteousness. Since he has done all these abominations, he would surely die. He is legally responsible for his own death. He will not benefit in any way from his father's righteousness.

In the third case, there is a son born to a wicked father, but he avoids the sins of his father. He looks at the sinful life of his father and sees the terrible consequences to the rebellion against God. He disdains the sins of his father and does what is right. He prefers to follow his righteous grandfather in executing the righteous requirements of God. His father did eat *sour grapes* and died for his rebellion. This son avoided the sins of his father and because of this his teeth were not *set on edge*. He considered the wicked ways of his father, avoided his father's sins, followed the ways of his grandfather, walking in God's statutes and therefore he lived.

The rule of judgment is repeated for emphasis and made clear. The son shall not be punished for the sins of his father, nor shall the father be punished for the sins of his son. It will be manifest that the righteous is not under punishment by the obvious blessings and benefits on his life that are the just rewards of righteousness. Conversely the wicked will be clearly seen to be under judgment. His cursed condition is apparent, as a result of his wickedness and he will die.

The proverb is false, for the rule is that the righteous man will benefit from his own righteousness and be blest, but the unrighteous man will be cursed because of his own wickedness and die. The people's complaint that they were suffering because of the iniquity of their ancestors who had not followed the ways of righteousness, had no basis. Now it is true that God will curse wicked families, but it is their wickedness that will bring destruction on them.

Verse 30. ... *I will judge you, O house of Israel, ...* their muttering aside, a compelling case is made against Israel and they are to be judged *according to their ways*, not the *ways* of their fathers. Despite all their wickedness, insolence and blasphemy, the Lord still desired to show them mercy and so rather than proceed to strict justice; he exhorts and advises them to repent. Their only hope was repentance, and this was a sure hope, for God takes no delight in judging them to their destruction, but graciously desired their salvation on repentance.

*Repent and turn...*a strong exhortation, a radical change of direction. It was still in their power to discard their idolatrous practices and avoid ruin. It is the only way, and it is a sure way to prevent the destruction to which sins lead. The clear implication is that, if they did not repent, iniquity would be their ruin, but if they did, they were safe; *'snatched as brands out of the burning'*.

Verse 31. *Cast away from you all your transgressions ...* this is important enough to restate in a slightly different way. God said that He would judge the *house of Israel* [collective singular, corporate aspect], *every one of you according to his ways* [personal singular]. Although each person was responsible for his or her own guilt before the Lord, individual decisions affected the community as a whole. The collective singular *house of* shows that the covenant God had



with Israel was corporate; it included the whole of Israel. The singular *every one of you* shows that the overall moral tone of the community was formed on the collective choices of individuals. The Israelites were to look not at the conduct of their ancestors but to their own. The people were to rid themselves of any and all personal sin. To repent is to avoid the judgment of death that sin brings. God would be gracious and forgive all who turned to Him in repentance. Those in the generation experiencing exile were worthy of the judgment that also could have fallen on the prior generation. However, God was equally clear that condemnation was not inevitable. He defined repentance as the rejection of one's past sinful ways, and He appealed to the *house of Israel* to accept *a new heart and a new spirit*. God had already promised to do this (Ezekiel 11:19).

The command to *make you a new heart and a new spirit* is set against the idols and images they had forged. The thought is not what men *can* do, but what they *ought* to do. God alone can make a new heart. The design of the command is to let men feel their own helplessness and to seek God's Holy Spirit. One writer comments in part:

"...Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit:" a man cannot, indeed, create either of these by his own power; God alone can give them (Ezek. 11:19). But a man both can and should come to God to receive them: in other words, he can turn to God, and let both heart and spirit be renewed by the Spirit of God. And this God is willing to do; for He has no pleasure in the death of the dying one..."

... spirit--the understanding: as the "heart" means *the will and affections*. The root must be changed before the fruit can be good.

God's rhetorical question *Why will ye die?* meant that the sentence of death was not inevitable since God extended an offer of forgiveness through repentance. Each individual had the freedom to choose life or death. People are capable of knowing right from wrong and God deals with us on that basis. They were parties to a covenant, the stipulations they fully understood. The blame for one's sin and judgment cannot be shifted to God, Satan, nature, nurture, parents, or circumstances.

They needed to adopt a new heart attitude, a new spirit, a spirit of compliance to God's will. It was unnecessary that they die prematurely for their sins when they could turn from them and continue to live (Rom. 13:14).

Verse 32. *For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.*

This death among His people gave the Lord no pleasure (v. 23; Isa. 28:21; John 5:40; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). He called them to change their attitude, to practice obedience to the covenant, and to live. Repentance was possible for the generation of Jews to whom Ezekiel ministered in Babylon.

God still deals with people in the same righteous manner under the New Covenant as He did under the Old. Whereas our responsibilities under the New Covenant are somewhat different from Israel's under the Old, the Lord still holds His people personally responsible for our obedience to His will. Personal failure to obey still affects our present lives negatively and personal obedience still affects our lives positively.

As Christians, we are personally responsible for our actions, just as the Israelites were. Our personal actions will affect our lives just as was true in Israel. For Christians, who live under the New Covenant, premature death may be God's judgment for sin (e.g. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30;



1 John 5:16). However, under the New Covenant, what we do in this life also has eternal consequences, not that we will lose our salvation, but we will suffer the loss of some eternal rewards (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:8-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The Lord normally gave Old Testament saints the hope that their reward would come before they died (Dan. 12:2-3, 13), but He has given Christians the hope that our reward will come mainly after we die. God has always justified people for their trust in Him and He has always rewarded for their works.

CONCLUSION

So what is the real problem? It is clear that we do not want to look at the real hard truths about ourselves and feel bad about ourselves. We do not want to do the hard and painful work of confronting ourselves.

We preferred therefore to blame other people or even blame God for OUR problems. Is not the sins of others but our own sins and so we do everything that we can so that we do not see our own sins.

We will either set our parents mistreated us and are responsible for what we do, or maybe the devil made me do it. We love to hear that coming through these, but it is a serious matter. So from the time sin came into the world Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit even though he did not have to take it and eat it, Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her, and then Adam blamed God for giving him the woman. So says Genesis 3:12-13.

So though it might sound strange accepting responsibility for OUR sins makes it possible for us to let it go. We are not treating sin like it is a burden, and we should not cultivate regret and remorse. Repentance therefore is the first step toward being transformed.

It is a deliberate step in a new direction it will take us into the future and into life itself.

We should be careful because there is a sin that clings closely to us and hinders us. We all have some kind of sin like that which hinders us in the race of faith, which makes us get weary and fainthearted.

- When you examine yourself, you will find that over your lifetime you are probably guilty of maybe only one or two different sins, but they keep repeating themselves over and over again. Some are trapped into chasing after accumulating money even though it hard to works and turns off others. Some like to chase after the pleasure that they think they get from having sexual relationships with a succession of women or men and they may keep on doing this even though it doesn't take them anywhere. Others of us like possessing "things". Others are attracted to accumulating power. Others chase after the "fountain of youth" and it's been fantastic amounts of money to young and attractive and vibrant. In the long run none of these things work for you. They are only an illusion. They seem attractive to us because Scripture says there is a veil over our eyes which Jesus will remove when it comes. The message to the exiles therefore Goes out to all Christians.
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- We must repent of our sins, that is, change our minds and our ways and demonstrate the fruits of repentance. We must forsake the sins of our past and reject the ways that marked us as sinners. We have to turn away from every single one of our sins and the break must be so sharp, that we could never go back to our former behavior.



Ezekiel emphasized the principle of personal responsibility. We cannot excuse our sinful lifestyle by blaming our environment. We are responsible to take charge of our own life. We will be judged individually for our own actions!

The Church in every generation must be alerted to a future judgment seat that is to be a sober constraint and incentive in present living (Rom 14:10, 12; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 6:7-8). The necessity of continuance in the faith and in a lifestyle that commends it is backed by grave provisos from which no believer is exempt (Rom 11:22; 1 Cor 15:2; Col 1:23; Heb. 3:14).

