

Ezekiel
January 6, 2008
Chapters 18-20, Emphasis 18

I. Israel is Being Judged for Its Sins

While we can place blame for sins on many places, it is ultimately the individual who is responsible for them. Therefore, others are not specifically rewarded or punished for another's sin, even when they are close relatives; this is unlike much of the ancient world where the son might be punished for the father's sins. Of course, reality might seem to act out differently for these two reasons:

1. The curses or the blessings that follow from a person's actions will affect those around him, most especially other family members.
2. The sin of the father is often played out over and over again in the next generations.

There are some key underlying reasons why the great truths of individual accountability are discussed at this time. As a nation and as a people, God's chosen people have left God behind. People from the top of their society to the bottom have done this. They have a chance to change direction. That chance is totally dependent on the individual leaving behind the false teachings of the last several generations and to return to God.

II. False Prophets

Ezek 18:1-4

18:1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? 3 "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. 4 For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son — both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

NIV

The implications of the proverb are that fathers do something, and the children are punished for it. (Sour grapes cause one's teeth to be set on edge; the children's teeth are set on edge even though they have not eaten any.) In Israel, people should not punish children for the acts of parents.

Discussion: How about in the book of Joshua when whole nations are wiped out, including the children?

III. Examples

Ezek 18:10-13

10 "Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things 11(though the father has done none of them): "He eats at the mountain shrines. He defiles his neighbor's wife. 12 He oppresses the poor and needy. He commits robbery. He does not return what he took in pledge. He looks to the idols. He does detestable things. 13 He lends at usury and takes excessive interest.

Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he will surely be put to death and his blood will be on his own head.

NIV

We are given three parallel examples, of which this is the middle one. They

are: Righteous man...will live (5-9)

Evil man, son of righteous man...will not live (10-14)

Righteous man, son of evil man...will live (15-19)

IV. Explanation

Ezek 18:19-20

19 "Yet you ask, 'Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?' Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. 20 The soul who sins is the one who will die. 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.

NIV

The righteous man and the wicked man will be so credited. Of course, from the NT, we know that humans cannot be righteous enough for God if they sin only once in their entire lives. It takes the "imputed righteousness" of Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

What does it mean to live or to die in Ezekiel 18? Is this different from the NT?

Ezek 18:21-23

21 "But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. 22 None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. 23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

NIV

This teaching is very much in keeping with NT teaching.

Ezek 18:24

24 "But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die.

NIV

Some might be more bothered by this teaching, but it too is reflected in the NT. While for many this is a tough teaching, it does not negate eternal salvation assuming the person was saved in the first place, but it does indicate that a person can lose everything including their own lives.

John 15:6

6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

NIV

Ezek 18:25-29

25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? 26 If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. 27 But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. 28 Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. 29 Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?

NIV

If tempted to judge God, we should always remember that He is smarter than us and has a lot more information. If we think that He has done wrong, we should think again.

V. Conclusion

Ezek 18:30-32

30 "Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. 31 Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

NIV

Each individual is responsible for his own behavior. They must turn away from their wicked ways or die in that sin. Apparently almost all Israelites of Ezekiel's time had gone far in their sin of accommodation. All of them were guilty. The nation could not be changed in totality until individuals started changing.

What does verse 32 mean?

VI. Chapter 19: Israel's Last, Lamentable Kings

The lions in Chapter 19 are kings of Israel, although people debate which lion is which king. My view is:

- Mother lioness:** Jerusalem, or the line of David.
- First cub/lion:** Jehoahaz
- Hooks to Egypt:** The king of Egypt takes defeated Jehoahaz home.
- Second cub/lion:** Jehoiakim
- Hooks to Babylon:** Ditto except Jehoiakim goes to Babylon.
- Vine:** Israel, Jerusalem, or the line of David
- East wind:** Nebuchadnezzar taking out Zedekiah.
- Planted in a desert:** Probably a reference to the exiles in Babylon.

VII. Chapter 20

In this chapter, the elders come to inquire of God through Ezekiel. The nature of their inquiries is not given, but they might have been suggesting that God was not just, thereby judging Him, because of His actions. Instead of consoling them, God has Ezekiel to tell them why He is being just, pointing out the long history of rebellion of the Jewish people.

Only at the end do we see a glimmer of hope. This hope will be expounded much more beginning in Chapter 33. Throughout this book, even in the first 24 chapters, there is always a hope for the future. However, for the deportees, they will have to go through the worse of it before it will start to get better. Indeed, the greater future for Israel still lies in the future.

VIII. Questions

1. What false ideas put forth in the three-generational pattern does the LORD oppose with a divine oath?
2. What is the point affirmed by listing both the acts of the righteous and unrighteous?
3. How can a righteous God forgive the sins of unrighteous people?
4. How does God feel when someone dies in a sinful state?
5. What is a lament?
6. What kings of Judah do the young lions represent?
7. What king will reverse Judah's political fortunes?
8. In 20:5-9, how did God reveal Himself to the Israelites in Egypt? How did they rebel? What display of divine wrath was given? Why did God not destroy them there?
9. What does it mean when Scripture says that those obey or keep God's law will live by them?
10. Why do you think that God is concerned about His reputation?