

Ezek. 18:1 The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,
Ezek. 18:2 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?

Ezekiel receives yet another message from the Lord. The Lord is taking issue with a common saying in the land of Israel. The meaning of the saying seems to be explained more clearly by the prophet Jeremiah in his book of Lamentations.

Lam. 5:7 Our fathers have sinned, *and are not*; and we have borne their iniquities.

It would seem that this saying was a result of a wrong understanding of God's word. I was also confused until I began my own verse-by-verse study of the scripture. In Exodus we find this scripture.

Ex. 20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me;

I think an excerpt from my journal on Exodus is appropriate here.

When we choose to follow other gods (really self), then we are building our lives on a lie which will impact in turn the lives of our children and in turn their children etc. It's interesting that the Lord used the designation of the 3rd & 4th generations. I just realized that those would be the normal generations of a man's lifespan upon whom he would have direct impact. On the other hand, those who love Him and keep His commandments can expect God's love to be evident to their children for generations. The more submissive and obedient we are, the stronger the foundation for our progeny.

Constable quoting Cooper: "Individually each person is responsible for his/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."

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

The Lord is tired of hearing the truth of His word misinterpreted. Right now He is going to set the record straight.

Ezek. 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.

Each individual is held accountable to God for his/her own sin. Yes, we are influenced by those around us; but we are ultimately accountable before God as individuals. The Hebrew for *die* is a reference to being killed. I think it is important to note that the context of this passage is addressing the righteousness of God in punishing the people of Israel by causing them to be taken into captivity and their nation destroyed.

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

Ezek. 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 neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,*

Ezek. 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;*

Ezek. 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,*

Ezek. 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.*

In this section of verses the Lord gives a description of a *just* (moral) man, a man that obeys God's law and does what is right.

- He doesn't worship idols.
Ex. 20:4-5 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...
- He hasn't committed adultery.
Ex. 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- He hasn't had intercourse with a woman during her period.
Lev. 20:18 And if a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness, and shall uncover her nakedness; he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood: and both of them shall be cut off from among their people.
- He hasn't mistreated anyone.
- He returns collateral taken as a result of giving a loan.
Ex. 22:26 If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:
- He is not a robber.
Ex. 20:15 Thou shalt not steal.
- He has shared his food with those in need.
- He has given clothing to those in need.
- He has not loaned to others and charged them interest.
Ex. 22:25 If thou lend money to *any of my people that is* poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.
- He avoids evil, wicked actions.
- He is trustworthy and fair in his dealings with other people.
- He has lived according to God's laws and directions.

The man who lives accordingly will *live* ("keep alive" from the Hebrew).

Ezek. 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,*

Ezek. 18:11 *And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife,*

Ezek. 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,

Ezek. 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.

Now suppose, says the Lord, that this *just* man has a son who is totally different from him. He is a robber, a murderer, an idol worshipper, an adulterer, and who has lived a life of wickedness. Should God allow him to go on living in such a way? God's answer: No. He deserves to die as a consequence of his own wickedness.

Ezek. 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,

Ezek. 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 neighbour's wife,

Ezek. 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,

Ezek. 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.

Now suppose that this wicked man has a son who grows up and chooses not to be anything like his wicked father. He doesn't worship idols; he's sexually pure; he is considerate, honest and compassionate in his dealings with other people; he tries to live his life in obedience to the Lord. This man will not be punished as a result of his father's wickedness; in fact, he will be allowed to live his life free of any responsibility for the actions of his father.

Ezek. 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 wicked father, on the other hand, will be judged and condemned to death on the basis of his own sins.

Ezek. 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.

It's like the Lord is saying in this verse, "I know what you are thinking. You are thinking about the words recorded by Moses. Why isn't the son being visited with the iniquity of his father?"

The Lord is saying point blank that the son who lives a moral life and acts in obedience to the law will be allowed to live before the Lord accordingly. (4/07) He has wisely chosen to reject his father's lifestyle and influence. Sadly, this is the exception, not the norm.

Ezek. 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.

It is the soul that continues in sin that brings upon himself the judgment of death. Sons aren't held accountable for the sins of their fathers, and fathers aren't held accountable for the sins of their sons. Each person is accountable before God for his/her own actions.

Ezek. 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.

Ezek. 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.

As long as a man has breath in his body, he has the opportunity to repent and change his ways. If a wicked man chooses to repent and live his life according to God's laws and morals, he will be allowed to live in accordance with that decision. Verse 22 is a statement of the truth that sins once forgiven are forgotten in God's accounting books.

Ezek. 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?*

Man was created according to God's desire and to bring Him glory.

Rev. 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Is. 43:7 *Even* every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

God's desire was for fellowship with man. He didn't create just so He could destroy.

Lev. 26:12 And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Rev. 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.

God's desire for our fellowship is evidenced in so many ways in scripture. You can hear His heart as He calls out to Adam and Eve in the garden after they had sinned. You can recognize it as He describes Enoch and Noah as men who walked with Him. It is evident in His delight at claiming Abraham and David as His friends. He physically demonstrated that desire by filling the tabernacle and then the temple with the cloud of His glory that represented His presence among the people. It was evident in the Lord Jesus as He dwelt among the people and invested of Himself so unselfishly and sacrificially. You can hear the satisfaction as He speaks of a time that He will dwell with men in a right relationship in the new heavens and new earth.

Ezek. 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.

The Lord continues this discourse on man's accountability by stating that just as surely as the wicked man can repent, the righteous man can rebel. A man who chooses to reject God and turn back to wickedness and disobedience will be judged according to his actions. You can't build up an account of good deeds that will make up for future evil deeds. It's like you are erasing the blackboard and starting over again—whether from evil to good or good to evil.

Ezek. 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?

Again, the Lord is anticipating the response of the people. He can hear them accusing Him of being unfair. God basically says, "It is you who are unfair, not me." (4/07) God has established the rules clearly and publicly; He faithfully acts according to those rules. Israel nor the believer has grounds for accusing God of breaking the rules.

Ezek. 18:26 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.

Ezek. 18:27 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.

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

Because God declares judgment on one who has rebelled and rejected Him, we think He is unfair by not putting up with their sin longer in hopes that they will repent. Just because God is longsuffering in allowing a time for repentance, we judge Him as being unfair to those that are living in obedience and faithfulness to Him. All that does is illustrate His righteousness compared to our wickedness and the greatness of His love as compared to our selfishness.

Ezek. 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?

What we forget to consider is God's character and His omniscience. He is telling us that He is not willing that any person should perish. He knows and has known the response each person would have to Him from before the foundation of the world. Because He is righteous and holy, we have no right to question any decision He makes. It is we who make decisions that are selfish and unfair.

Psa. 145:17 The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

Ezek. 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.

Ezek. 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 Lord is now making an appeal through His prophet Ezekiel for His people to repent of their wicked ways and turn back to Him in faith and obedience. His desire is for them to live and prosper. "Make a new heart and a new spirit" is a call to make a choice to live righteously. God does not like to judge their sin any more than they enjoy experiencing His judgment.

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

The Lord emphasizes again that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. His desire is for men to repent of their evil ways and live.

I can't leave this chapter without commenting on the difference of living under the law and living under grace. Until Jesus came in obedience to His Father and willingly sacrificed Himself for the sins of man and provided the Holy Spirit as the earnest seal of our position in Him, man was subject to the provision made for him through the law. The principles that were true then are true now. The problem comes when we try to take a teaching specifically addressing a time of judgment under the law and applying the specifics to those living under grace. Personally, I believe a man of true faith of all times is proved by his continuance in that faith. Those who choose to "leave" or "turn from" that faith never really possessed that faith. That principle is explained in the New Testament. John wrote about it when describing "antichrists" that would appear during the last days.

1John 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

1John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: **but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.**

Peter described it in a different way.

2Pet. 2:20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

2Pet. 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.

2Pet. 2:22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, **The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.**

I think some comments from my journal on verse 22 apply here.

The first half of this verse is a quote from Proverbs.

Prov. 26:11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, *so* a fool returneth to his folly.

The second half of the verse is emphasizing the first.

The whole verse emphasizes the truth of being born again and becoming a new creation. You can train a dog and clean a dog up and feed it the best of foods, but you can't change its nature. A dog is a dog; it's going to do the disgusting things that dogs do. You can take a pig and clean it up, but

as soon as you turn the pig loose, it's going to search for the mud. A pig likes mud.

Until we are born again and become a new creature in Christ, we are going to continue to be subject to the sin nature that we inherited from our fathers (all the way back to Adam).

2Cor. 5:17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Another significant distinction is regarding the purpose and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In the Old Testament times the Spirit did not function among men of faith in the same way. Since Jesus returned to heaven, believers are privileged to possess the indwelling Holy Spirit as a "down payment" so to speak of his inheritance for eternity and as a seal of protection and preservation to get the believer to that inheritance.

2Cor. 1:21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God;

2Cor. 1:22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Eph. 1:13 In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Eph. 1:14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

It is God who gives us the Holy Spirit at salvation, and His gifts are irrevocable.

Rom. 11:29 For the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.

It is also God who gives us the gift of salvation.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Eph. 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Although I'll never be able to explain it well this side of heaven, I know that God has said that He is not willing that any should perish and that we are responsible for making the choice to follow Him in faith and obedience or not. He is also the one that gifts us with the faith and grace to accomplish our salvation, and once He begins that good work in us through giving us that gift, He is going to finish the work He started.

Phil. 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:

I don't have to be able to explain it all to accept it all as true by faith. I claim the truth presented by the prophet Isaiah:

Is. 55:8 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

Is. 55:9 For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.