

EZEKIEL: STREET PREACHER TO THE EXILES

Bible Background – EZEKIEL 18

Printed Text – EZEKIEL 18:1-9; 30-32

The Justice of a Righteous God

18 Then another message came to me from the LORD:

²“Why do you quote this proverb concerning the land of Israel: ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children’s mouths pucker at the taste’?”

³As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, you will not quote this proverb anymore in Israel.

⁴For all people are mine to judge—both parents and children alike. And this is my rule: The person who sins is the one who will die.

⁵“Suppose a certain man is righteous and does what is just and right.

⁶He does not feast in the mountains before Israel’s idols or worship them. He does not commit adultery or have intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period.

⁷He is a merciful creditor, not keeping the items given as security by poor debtors. He

does not rob the poor but instead gives food to the hungry and provides clothes for the needy.

⁸He grants loans without interest, stays away from injustice, is honest and fair when judging others,

⁹and faithfully obeys my decrees and regulations. Anyone who does these things is just and will surely live

³⁰“Therefore, I will judge each of you, O people of Israel, according to your actions, says the Sovereign LORD. Repent, and turn from your sins. Don’t let them destroy you!

³¹Put all your rebellion behind you and find yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O people of Israel?

³²I don’t want you to die, says the Sovereign LORD. Turn back and live!” says the Sovereign LORD.

-----New Living Translation

Lesson Introduction

It is an easy thing to blame one’s background or upbringing for difficult situations one may face. There seems to be a growing school of thought for some, that “my circumstances would be different if only my parents had done things differently.” It appears that personal accountability is not very popular in today’s society. The Israelite exiles in Babylon seemed to adhere to the same viewpoint—that it was not due to their own rebellious behavior that brought about the destruction of their nation, but it was the fault of their forefathers. However, God had a different message for the people through the prophet Ezekiel. God declares that He is Sovereign and knows who is deserving of judgment. As we study this lesson, let us examine our own behavior for times when we have not accepted personal responsibility for our actions. We must commit to personal obedience to engage in behavior that finds favor with God.

Background: The Prophet Ezekiel lived during the Babylonian exile and was active as a prophet for approximately 20 years from 593 BC to at least 573 BC. Ezekiel lived as an exile according to the title of the book that bears his name (Ezekiel 1:1-2), he was carried away as a captive with Jehoiachin (1:2; 2 Kings 24:14-16) in about 597 BC. His prophetic call came to him in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity (593 BC). Ezekiel held a prominent place among the exiles and was frequently consulted by the elders (Ezekiel 8:1; 11:25; 14:1; 20:1). In the ninth year of his exile, he lost his wife by some sudden and unforeseen tragedy (8:1; 24:1, 18). According to the information in the book's opening, he was the son of the priest Buzi (2:3) and his name in Hebrew meant "God strengthens (this child)" or possibly, "May God strengthen (this person)." Because he was of a priestly family, he probably had a good education, especially in the Law, and his father may even have had some influence in Jerusalem. The time and manner of his death are unknown.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 447.

God Reminds Judah of His Sovereignty

Ezekiel 18:1-4: Old sayings and proverbs born out of tradition rather than the wisdom of God have a way of embedding themselves into our thought processes. Apparently, the Jews who were in exile used this one to justify their circumstances: The father eats the sour grapes but the children's mouths pucker—as though the ancestors could eat unripe, bitter fruit, but the bitter effect was experienced by the children who did not eat it. Israel wanted to believe that they suffered because of the wickedness of past generations. They refused to accept that their current suffering was directly related to their own refusal to obey God and repent.

The Mosaic Law called for personal responsibility for wrong behavior (Exodus 20:22-23:33). But exiled Israel chose to focus on the part of the Decalogue where the Lord threatened to punish the children for the sins of their fathers to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9). But in the early times of the young nation, one's family or clan lived closely together, where three or four generations of one family likely participated or at least were complicit in any sin the family's patriarch would commit. But to accuse God of such partiality and error as to punish the innocent descendants for the sins of the fathers is to accuse God of being unjust and unrighteous. So, God says that the old adage described in verse 2 does not hold up under scrutiny and they will use that excuse no longer.

God reminds them that He is Sovereign and that everyone belongs to Him. He is the Creator and Sustainer of life and He does what is right in His own eyes. He has the authority to deal with each one as He sees fit. But to be clear, the one who sins is the one who suffers [spiritual] death.

◆*Why do we often feel we are being punished for someone else's missteps?*

God Reminds Them What is Righteous

Ezekiel 18:5-9: In these verses, God reminds Israel of what is righteousness. The behaviors that are described as 'just' (Heb. *tsadiq*) and 'right' (Heb. *tsedaqah*) have a root meaning of being "true" and

May 23, 2021 – Study Guide 12

“straight,” which implies having a right relationship with God. The examples given of the behavior for those who are righteous include; “doesn’t eat at the pagan shrines, doesn’t worship the idols so popular in Israel, doesn’t seduce a neighbor’s spouse, doesn’t indulge in casual sex, doesn’t bully anyone, doesn’t pile up bad debts, doesn’t steal, doesn’t refuse food to the hungry, doesn’t refuse clothing to the ill-clad, doesn’t exploit the poor, doesn’t live by impulse and greed, doesn’t treat one person better than another, But lives by my statutes and faithfully honors and obeys my laws.” [Ezekiel 18:6-9, MSG]

God Reminds Them of their Personal Responsibility

Ezekiel 18:30-32: Although an individual’s sins can certainly affect an entire community, God judges individuals based on their own behavior and response to His precepts. Even in times of widespread judgment, God has demonstrated that He chooses to save the righteous. He did it for Noah (Gen. 6:8); for Lot (Gen. 19:16); and for Rahab (Joshua 6:17). And the Lord, through His prophet, Ezekiel urges Israel to turn from their iniquity and transgressions. Even though they have been placed in exile in the land of the enemy, God still assures them that life or death is a choice. They still have the opportunity to return to Him in truth and righteousness. The glorious thing is that He takes absolutely no pleasure in anyone perishing and succumbing to spiritual death. His desire is for all who will to repent, with a change of heart, and to choose life.

◆*Look at problems you have caused yourself. What attitude does God want you to have toward these problems?*

Conclusion

The conditions for salvation are consistent between the Old Testament and the New Testament—to trust God with your total being. When you proclaim Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are confessing that you have placed yourself in God’s hands to make everything right between you and Him. (Romans 10:9-10). So, no more excuses or playing the blame game. The buck stops with us and our personal behavior. We are called to commit to responsible behavior that finds favor with God.

Sources:

Banks, M. (Ed.). (2020). Call in the New Testament. *Precepts for Living*, 23(Spring Quarter), 443-452. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.
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May 23, 2021 – Study Guide 12

Lesson for Next Week – May 30, 2021 – Study Guide 13

JONAH: DO THE RIGHT THING

Bible Background ♦ JONAH 3

Printed Text ♦ JONAH 3

Devotional Reading ♦ JONAH 2

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jonah's Experience Foreshadows Christ's
(Matthew 12:38-42)

TUESDAY

Nineveh's Repentance: A Lasting Message
(Luke 11:29-32)

WEDNESDAY

Jonah Turns Away from God's Call
(Jonah 1:1-12)

THURSDAY

Sailors Make Vows to the Lord
(Jonah 1:13-16)

FRIDAY

Jonah Resents God's Grace Toward Others
(Jonah 4:1-5)

SATURDAY

God's Compassion Overrides Jonah's Personal Comfort
(Jonah 4:6-11)

SUNDAY

God's Mercy Prevails
(Jonah 3)