



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 12, 2007
Released on August 8, 2007**

Ezekiel Preached About Individual Responsibility

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 18:20–24.
Background Scripture: Ezekiel 18.
Printed Text: Ezekiel 18:4, 20–23, 30–32.**

Ezekiel 18:4, 20–23, 30–32

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.

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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.

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.

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.

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?

.....

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.

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?

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

Introduction

Isaiah declared that Judah's captivity was coming. Jeremiah declared that the captivity had come. Now during that captivity, the prophet Ezekiel, who was carried away to Babylon in a deportation 11 years before the fall of Jerusalem and massive exile, declared the word of the Lord once again.

The people of Judah were exiles in captivity in Babylon. Although it had happened just as the prophets had repeatedly warned, the people were bitter about their

situation. They did what human nature so often causes people to do: they refused to take responsibility for their own sins and blamed others instead. At this time everything looked hopeless as far as any restoration to their homeland was concerned; so their negative feelings were running deep. It just did not seem right that they were made to suffer in this way.

Who should they blame, then, if they were not at fault? It became common to place the blame on their ancestors, and so a proverb was soon being passed around among the captives. It said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). The meaning is quite apparent: their ancestors had been disobedient to God, and now the present generation was suffering the consequences by being sent into captivity in a land far from home.

Lesson Background

Setting the record straight-Ezekiel 18:1-4

This common proverb (v.2) misrepresented God, who told the people of Judah to stop using it. People of that day quoted it from Exodus 34:7, in which God warned the Israelites that he "punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. "The people who heard this said, in effect, "Why should we obey God? He's going to judge us for our fathers' sins. So let's live as we please."

The Lord makes it clear here in verse 4 and in the rest of this chapter that he does not judge individuals for their parents' sins. We are all responsible for our own conduct. But a parent's wrong choices may continue to have consequences for three and four generations. We only need to look at the lives of millions who grew up with alcoholic, abusive or unfaithful parents to know this is true.

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine the message about individual accountability God gave to the people of Judah in exile.

Principle: to accept that each person is accountable for his own life.

Application: to understand that we will be held accountable for our own choices in life.

GOD'S VIEWPOINT-Ezekiel 18:4, 20-23

1. What is the bottom line about God's view of sin (Ezekiel 18:4)?

God immediately established the fact that every person is an individual in His sight. Every soul belongs to Him, whether father or son, mother or daughter, or any other relationship. Since that is the case, every individual is accountable to Him for the way he lives.

The bottom line of God's reasoning is that whoever sins will die. Therefore, we do have to be concerned about our relationship with God, because we will answer to Him for how we have lived-whether in obedience or in disobedience to His Word and will. Any person who refuses to live according to God's ways will be punished, without exception. Those who live for Him will be rewarded.

Ezekiel followed this statement with a detailed explanation using a three-generation family (vs. 5-18).

2. What does a person's free will have to do with his choice to live in sin (v. 20)?

Ezekiel introduced another factor to the equation. There is no generational transfer of either sin or *righteousness*.

Therefore, men and women do not have to remain in the same spiritual condition. They have a choice in the matter. A change of heart is possible in most cases. Ezekiel had dealt with change from one generation to another, but now he referred to change in an individual. Even though judgment was pronounced against an evil person, there was a way to escape judgment.

3. What did God say about what He would do if a wicked man changed his ways to righteousness (vs. 21, 22)?

The requirement is that a person turn away from a sinful lifestyle and begin to do what God wants. The Hebrew word translated "turn" (Ezek. 18:21) means "to turn back" or "to retreat." The sinful person is going the wrong direction in life and needs to turn away from, to repent of, that and turn to godliness. The guilt is clear: he has "sins that he hath committed." Sin is anything that is opposed to holiness and everything that is contrary to the character and will of God.

"Ezekiel . . . took the hypothetical case of a wicked man who radically changes, and forsakes his wicked ways in order to do God's righteous will. The implication is clear that man has the ability to determine his final condition. Such a man will not die but surely live. Thus, not only is a man free from his father's misdeeds; he can also break with his own ungodly past if his heart desires. . . . His past will be no deterrent to the blessing of God" (Feinberg, *Prophecy of Ezekiel*, Wipf and Stock Pubs.).

Let us grasp the magnitude of this statement: "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him" (Ezek. 18:22)? David wrote, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:10-12). God sees believers as having the righteousness of His Son (Phil. 3:9).

4. God neither keeps a record of a Christian's sins nor remembers them. How do you use this fact to develop a godly nature?

Reminders of our past sin come from three sources: Satan, other people, and self. Learning to let go of the past and not hold on to guilt can be difficult when these three sources keep bombarding us with reminders! Recognizing the source of the discouragement is important. One thing is certain: the source is not God.

Another challenge we have is to hold no sins of others against them. When someone has repented and is trying to put his or her life back together, we as brothers and sisters in Christ are to do all we can to affirm and assist in the restoration process. God expects us to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. (See James 5:19).

5. How did God express His desire that people not die from sin (v. 23)?

In a very pointed question, God asked, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: *God* does not find *pleasure* in giving sinners what they

deserve. The implication is that He does find joy in forgiving so that *the wicked* may *live*. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent and turn from their evil ways (2 Peter 3:9).

"Mankind needs God's gift of salvation more than anything else. With God's salvation there is eternal life; without it there is eternal separation from God and all that is holy and good, plus eternal punishment" (Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, Kregel). In salvation God graciously delivers undeserving people from condemnation to justification and from the state of death to that of life. He so desires that people be saved that He willingly sent His only Son from heaven to become a man and die for their sins.

Surely this demonstrates His desire that none perish. And yet He does not force people into decisions of salvation. Because the need for salvation is universal, due to the fall of man at the time of Adam's sin, the provision is adequate for everyone. However, this provision is not applied until an individual receives Jesus as their personal Saviour. Anyone who refuses and is sentenced to eternal separation from God will have no one but himself to blame. God can never be blamed for a person's eternal loss.

MAN'S OPPORTUNITY-Ezekiel 18:30-32

6. What command was given regarding the transgressions people were committing (Ezekiel 18:30)?

We noted earlier that in God's eyes, every person is an individual who is accountable to Him. That was clearly indicated when God said, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways." He did not say He was going to judge them as a group.

He also let them know that if something was not done to correct things both as a nation and as individuals, there was going to be ruination. People cannot live apart from God and experience a whole, fulfilling life. An attempt to run one's own life will often result in a totally ruined life. One cannot, for example, indulge in a life of drinking or taking drugs without suffering the consequences. Eventually there will be physical and emotional destruction from which it might be impossible to recover.

7. What did God mean by "Cast away from you all your transgressions" (v. 31)?

The discarding of sinful deeds must follow repentance from sin. No one can claim repentance of stealing a car if he or she continues to drive it without the rightful owner's consent!

The sins to be discarded may include attitudes and language that are not pleasing to God. Such things are sometimes considered "little" sins, but the command to discard includes any sinful practice. Sin in any form is not acceptable.

The way to rid oneself of sin is to develop *a new heart* that will look on life with a new perspective. The writer of Hebrews affirms that without holiness no one will see God (Hebrews 12:14; compare Matthew 5:8). Having a new perspective means changing the way that a person thinks about life, and this is the new heart that God

demands. It also involves the mind, for Jesus stated that the first commandment is to love God with all the heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37).

8. What reminder is repeated at the end of Ezekiel's message (v. 32)?

Ezekiel 18 ends with a reminder of what we read in verse 23. There it was in the form of a question; in verse 32 it is a straightforward statement. *God has no pleasure in the death of any person.* This is confirmed by what is called the Golden Text of the Bible, John 3:16. The verse states that God so loved that He gave His Son. The purposes are that mankind may believe and no one would have to perish. God desires that everyone choose to *live* for Him.

The contrast in this verse is vivid: life or death. The challenge of the verse is the heart of the lesson: being committed to taking responsibility for one's spiritual destiny. It is a personal choice, and it cannot be delegated.

CONCLUSION

We will be accountable for the choices we make. The people of God in the Old Testament strayed from Him many times, just as we do, but each time they were offered a way out. God spoke to them through the different prophets. Ezekiel in particular reminded them that they were going to be held accountable for their actions individually.

Salvation in Jesus is a choice we can make today that will free us from our sin. We will be held accountable for this most important choice in this life, for it leads to life with God or eternal death.

PRAYER

Almighty God, I resolve today to have the correct responses as Your Word convicts me of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week we see how Zechariah, another of the prophets in the Old Testament, called the people back to repentance and God. Study Zechariah 1:1-6; 7:8-14.

Lesson Summarized By

Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries
www.jesusisall.com