



# Book of Ezekiel

## Chapter 18

*Theme: Jerusalem an example of “the wages of sin is death”; elegy of Jehovah over the princes of Israel*

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### **Sin By Heredity?**

In this chapter God is going to emphasize that these people are going to be judged for their personal sin. The concept that they had invoked, both from the proverb and from the Torah, was that the iniquity of the fathers was visited upon the children and they are going to use that as an excuse and say in effect, “OK, you’re judging us; but you are judging us for the sins of our fathers.” What God is going to do here through Ezekiel is emphasize their personal responsibility. They are getting judged for their sin, and he is going to use several examples in rebuttal to their hereditary arguments. This whole idea of personal responsibility is obviously not a new idea. Ezekiel talked about it in chapters 3 and 14. It is also dealt with in the Torah in Deut 24 and 2 Kgs 14.

In chapter 18 God will show that in His judgment He deals specifically and individually with each person.

### **God’s Justice Shown in His Treatment of Individuals. 18:1-32.**

Ezekiel begins this passage with Jeremiah’s quotation of a current saying (Jer 31:29) that had made its way to the exiles at Tell Abib: “The fathers used to eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are blunted” (Ezk 18:2).

Jeremiah had described the exiles carried away with Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. as “good figs,” while those left behind under Zedekiah were “bad figs” (Jer 24). The Jews of Zedekiah’s day probably looked upon themselves as righteous in comparison with the people of Manasseh’s era; and so the proverb may convey a tone of self-righteousness.

However, the people were slipping into despair and fatalism. If they were being punished for the crimes of Manasseh (II Kgs 24:3, 4) and for the sins of their fathers, why should they struggle? What chance does an individual have in the face of a fate inherited from the past? Why should anyone try to be godly in such an unjust world? (Cf. the hedonism pictured in Isa 22:12, 13). Is there any alternative to bleak despair for man? (Ezk 33:10)

Ezekiel had previously thundered wholesale condemnation on the people (cf. chs. 16; 20; 23). Yet God allowed for brands being plucked from the burning. The righteous were marked off from the wicked by a sign (4:4). In the face of imminent judgment, they would deliver their own lives, but no others (14:14, 16, 18, 20). However, repentance would be possible (14:6, 11).

The concepts of social solidarity and group responsibility were old in Israel. Ezekiel’s homily or essay in chapter 18 implies the working of the natural sequence of cause and effect amidst the circumstances of human life. God does not hold a man responsible for the circumstances into which he was born, but only for the use to which he puts them subsequently. Hence, a man is free to renounce his past, whether for good or for evil.

Just as a writer can change the course of a narrative by adding new material to the previously written chapters of a book, so, despite a dismal past, the present can become the opportunity for total transformation and can issue in a triumphant future. Forgiveness

does not obliterate the past, but relates it in a new way to God, so that we can transform it from a curse to a source of blessing (cf. Allen, *IB*, pp. 157-161).

Our prophet desires to vindicate divine justice and in doing so assigns new value to the individual in his treatment at the hands of God. God deals with men as individuals, says the prophet. “All souls are mine” (18:4). “I have no pleasure in the death of anyone” (v. 32, RSV). Since each soul is immediately related to God, its destiny depends on this relation. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (v. 4). “So turn and live” (v. 32). Cf. 3:16-21; 33:10-20.

As the representative of God, Ezekiel states that the individual man is not involved in the sins and fate of his fore-fathers (vv. 1-4). And then he develops the principle of the personal responsibility of the individual in the instance of three successive generations: a righteous father, a wicked son, and a righteous grandson (vv. 5-9, 10-13, 14-18). He restates the principle of individual responsibility (vv. 19, 20), and declares that divine forgiveness is available to the repentant sinner, but that the apostate will die in his sins (vv. 21-29). He concludes with an exhortation to repent and be saved (vv. 30-32).<sup>1</sup>

Ezekiel had delivered three parables to convict the nation of her sin (chaps. 15-17). He then returned to the bluntness of a direct message to drive home the fact of Israel’s guilt. The message in chapter 18 is similar to that in 12:21-28, for they both answered the people’s proverbs that denied their coming judgment.<sup>2</sup>

As indicated earlier (cf. 12:22), the people of Israel responded to the preaching of men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel with cliches and proverbs, not with reasoned argument. In chapter 18 Ezekiel refuted another such proverb: “The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.” The Lord expressed shock that anyone would think that he would punish one generation for the sins of another. When all the events unfold and the full implications of the judgment were known, they would not use this proverb any longer in Israel (18:1-3). In refuting the implications of this proverb Ezekiel touched on two basic doctrines of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

**ESV: Moral Responsibility:** Chapter 18 is sometimes thought to present a novel understanding of Hebrew ethics, as the high politics of chs. 17 and 19 give way to the lot of ordinary people. Some view the notions of corporate responsibility (cf. Josh. 7:19-26) and accumulated guilt (cf. 2 Kings 23:26) as the primary context for Ezekiel’s teaching and observe that, here in Ezekiel 18, he appears to depart from that context and focus on the moral responsibility of the individual. Of course, this reading sits well with modern individualism (which rightly stresses individual moral accountability) but it misses the primary communal focus of Ezekiel. Ezekiel’s “you” addresses are consistently in the plural (note also “house of Israel” in vv. 25, 29). The primary focus of this chapter is not so much on legal individual culpability as on divine justice resting afresh on each generation in accord with what that generation deserves.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 18 is sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:22-24). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 18:1-32). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

<sup>4</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

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**Constable:** This chapter, like 12:21–28, corrected a common proverb. This one dealt with the people’s false view of the reason for their judgment by God. In form it is a complex disputation speech.

This doctrine of transgenerational accountability was widespread in the ancient Near East.

In Chapters 18 and 33 are contained some of the most thorough, carefully expressed, and absolutely clear discourses on the topic of the responsibility of the individual for his or her own sins found anywhere in the Bible. These passages provide a valuable correction to the potential errors of fatalism, rigid determinism, and blame-avoidant judgmentalism.<sup>6</sup>

### **Ezekiel 18:1**

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

Again, it is clear that Ezekiel is not giving his own opinion. This is God’s Word.

**LAN:** The people of Judah believed they were being punished for the sins of their ancestors, not their own. They thought this way because this was the teaching of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5). Ezekiel taught that the destruction of Jerusalem was due to the spiritual decay in previous generations. But this belief in the corporate life of Israel led to fatalism and irresponsibility. So Ezekiel gave God’s new policy for this new land because the people had misconstrued the old one. God judges each person individually. Although we often suffer from the effects of sins committed by those who came before us, God does not punish us for someone else’s sins, and we can’t use their mistakes as an excuse for our sins. Each person is accountable to God for his or her actions.

In addition, some people of Judah used the corporate umbrella of God’s blessing as an excuse for disobeying God. They thought that because of their righteous ancestors (Ezekiel 18:5–9) they would live. God told them that they would not; they were the evil

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<sup>5</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010

sons of righteous parents and, as such, would die (Ezekiel 18:10-13). If, however, anyone returned to God, he or she would live (Ezekiel 18:14-18).<sup>7</sup>

**Chuck Smith:** Now, it is interesting that Ezekiel was in Babylon, and this proverb was at that time being spoken in Babylon. They're going around saying, "Well, our fathers ate sour grapes, and our teeth are set on edge." In other words, "We are bearing the results of our fathers' sins. We're suffering because of what our fathers did."

Now Jeremiah makes mention of the fact that this same proverb was being spoken back in Jerusalem. Those people in the siege were saying, "Our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and our teeth are set on edge." It's interesting how that we just don't like to take the blame for what we have done. We always like to blame someone else. So, if you're some kind of a neurotic nut, you go to a psychologist and they'll tell you, "Well, it's not you, it's your father, you see. That's your problem, your father ate the sour grapes. Now you're a neurotic mess, you know." Hey, you are what you are, and you might as well take responsibility for yourself. Quit trying to blame someone else for all of your ills or all of your problems.

That whole business of trying to blame someone else goes back to the beginning. God said, "Adam, what have you done?" "Oh, the woman that You gave me to be my wife, she did tempt me and I did eat." Rather than accept the responsibility for what a person has done, we always like to throw it over onto someone else. We're quite irresponsible in this manner.

But God is saying, "What is this proverb that these people are saying? 'Our fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.'"<sup>8</sup>

## **Ezekiel 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?**

That is another way of saying that the children are bearing the burden of the father's sin. While it is true that sin can carry on to our children in many ways, at the same time children are personally accountable as well. They, as children, were not innocent, and Ezekiel is going to push that.

**[The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge]** This proverb expresses the idea that the fathers are responsible for the sins of the children, but God proceeds to show that all men are equal, that no one man is responsible for the sins of another, that the soul who sins will die for his own sin, and that the soul who quits sin will live for his own righteousness, which naturally includes the will of God in salvation (Ezekiel 18:3-32).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>8</sup> Chuck Smith, Pastor, Notes on Ezekiel, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

<sup>9</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

**Clarke: The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?**—We have seen this proverb already, Jeremiah 31:29, etc., and have considered its general meaning. But the subject is here proposed in greater detail, with a variety of circumstances, to adapt it to all those cases to which it should apply. It refers simply to these questions: How far can the moral evil of the parent be extended to his offspring? And, Are the faults and evil propensities of the parents, not only transferred to the children, but punished in them? Do parents transfer their evil nature, and are their children punished for their offenses?<sup>10</sup>

**fathers ... eaten sour grapes, ... children's teeth ... set on edge**—Their unbelieving calumnies on God's justice had become so common as to have assumed a proverbial form. The sin of Adam in eating the forbidden fruit, visited on his posterity, seems to have suggested the peculiar form; noticed also by Jeremiah (Je 31:29); and explained in La 5:7, "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities." They mean by "the children," *themselves*, as though they were innocent, whereas they were far from being so. The partial reformation effected since Manasseh's wicked reign, especially among the exiles at Chebar, was their ground for thinking so; but the improvement was only superficial and only fostered their self-righteous spirit, which sought anywhere but in themselves the cause of their calamities; just as the modern Jews attribute their present dispersion, not to their own sins, but to those of their forefathers. It is a universal mark of corrupt nature to lay the blame, which belongs to ourselves, on others and to arraign the justice of God. Compare Ge 3:12, where Adam transfers the blame of his sin to Eve, and even to God, "The woman whom *thou* gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."<sup>11</sup>

**1-4** God asked Ezekiel about a proverb being circulated. This proverb—The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge—must have been well known in Israel because Jeremiah also quoted it (cf. Jer. 31:29-30). The proverb's point was that children were suffering because of their parents' sins. True, Jerusalem was suffering, but as stated in the proverb the people thought they were suffering not because of *their* sins but because of their *parents'* sins. So these people were blaming God for punishing them unjustly (cf. Ezek. 18:25).

God saw that this false proverb had to be refuted. Yet, as with all false doctrines, a kernel of truth in the teaching made it seem plausible. In the Ten Commandments God indicated that He was "a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me" (Ex. 20:5). This same threat was repeated in Exodus 34:6-7 and Deuteronomy 5:9. Even Ezekiel had traced God's coming judgment back to the people's past actions (cf. Ezek. 16:15-29). But the point of these passages was that the *effects* of sin are serious and long-lasting, not that God capriciously punishes the innocent for their ancestors' evil ways.

Blaming others for their misfortunes, the people were denying their own guilt. This was wrong because every individual is personally responsible to God. For every living

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>11</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

soul belongs to Me, the father as well as the son. Those who are guilty will receive their own deserved punishment. The soul who sins is the one who will die (cf. 18:20). The people of Israel could not rightly charge God with injustice.<sup>12</sup>

**Proverb** (*māshāl*). Cf. 8:12; 12:22, 23, The fathers have eaten (lit., *eat or used to eat* sour or unripe grapes *bōser*, and the children’s teeth are blunted (AV, *set on edge*). That is, the children suffer the consequences of the sins of their fathers (quoted in Jer 31:29, 30). On transmission of guilt, see Ex 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 24:16; II Kgs 14:6; Lam 5:7. 3. The use of this proverb, ascribing injustice to God, will stop at once. 4. All souls are mine; i.e., all persons belong to the Lord alike and individually, and he alone has the authority to judge. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. “Live” (vv. 9, 17, 19) and “die” (vv. 4, 13, 18) are used in both a literal and an eschatological sense. “To live” is to enter into the perfect kingdom of the Lord which is about to come (chs. 37; 38) and “to die” is to have no share in it. Ezekiel, like the other OT writers, views this kingdom as an earthly one.<sup>13</sup>

**McGee:** The children of Israel had a proverb they used, and it is mentioned twice by Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 31:29 we read, “In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” And then in Lamentations 5:7 we find, “Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.” I believe the people had built this proverb upon a passage back in Exodus: “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” (Exod. 20:5). The problem is that the proverb they drew from this verse is incorrect. That is the danger in lifting out one verse of Scripture without considering its context. This is a false proverb: The fathers ate the grapes, and the children paid the penalty. That is true to a certain extent, but God judges the individual, father or son, according to his conduct. This is not a judgment for eternal life, but a judgment in *this* life according as a man obeys or disobeys Him.<sup>14</sup>

A *proverb* was circulating in Jerusalem (Jer. 31:29) and Babylon that the children were suffering for the sins of their fathers. Although there are cumulative effects of sin (cf. Ex. 20:5-6; Matt. 23:35-36), the Lord here declares that each individual is accountable for his own sin (v. 4).

This classic proverb was in common use in Israel (Jer 31:29). It suggests that the sufferings of the present generation are due to the sins of the previous generation. Such a concept was a misinterpretation of Ex 20:5, which says that God visits the iniquity of one generation upon succeeding ones (cf. Ex 34:7). While it is true that the consequences of the sin of one generation will be visited on succeeding generations, the guilt of such sins is never transferable. Ezekiel declared the doctrine of individual responsibility for sin (vv.

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<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:1–4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>13</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 18:2). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>14</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

4, 20). There are three illustrations of the principle of individual responsibility: (1) a righteous man who does what is right (vv. 5-9), (2) a wicked son who has a righteous father (vv. 10-13), and (3) a righteous son who has a wicked father (vv. 14-20).

**Evil and Suffering, Deserved**—Complaining and blaming come easily. In Exile, Israel blamed their suffering on their parents' sins (Jer 31:29-30; La 5:7). Ezekiel removed Israel's right to blame and complain. Most often we suffer for our sins, not someone else's. Someone else may set the pattern, but people are responsible when they adopt the pattern for themselves and sin. Participation in group sin brings the threat of participation in group suffering. Ezekiel set up God's way of dealing with people. He did not attempt to set out a full doctrine of evil and suffering. Job and Jesus show us the innocent do suffer from sinful plots and plans of others. See Job 4:7-8, note; Isa 52:13-53:12.<sup>15</sup>

The Hebrew word (see Eccl. 10:10) rendered set on edge is literally "made dull" but can refer to a sour sensation. The main idea of the proverb is clear: children are affected by their parents' behavioral choices just as eating sour grapes produces a bitter taste. However, the people were interpreting and applying this proverb incorrectly; therefore, God said they should not use it any longer.

**Constable:** The Lord told Ezekiel to ask the people what they meant when they used a proverb that implied that the present generation of Israelites was suffering because of the sins of their forefathers (cf. Jer. 31:29). They were claiming to be the innocent victims of the actions of others, blaming others for their condition. In this they sounded just like many in our own day who refuse to take personal responsibility for their actions.

"The problem that the proverb poses for Ezekiel is not with punishment that children are bearing for the sins of the fathers, or even the issue of theodicy [i.e., the justice of God]. On the contrary, it reflects a materialistic fatalism, a resignation to immutable cosmic rules of cause and effect, an embittered paralysis of the soul, that has left the exiles without hope and without God. To the extent that the charge concerns God at all, it accuses him of disinterest or impotence in the face of the exiles' current crisis. All these years they have put their trust in their divine patron, only to discover that they are victims of an immutable law of the universe: the fate of one generation is inexorably determined by the actions of the previous. Their theology and their God have betrayed them.

Ezekiel will have none of this. In fact, the proverb becomes the point of departure for an extended lecture on a universe with unlimited room for movement, and for divine grace open to all who will listen."<sup>16</sup>

Earlier the Lord had told this same audience that other people would quote the proverb, "Like mother, like daughter" (16:44). This proverb expressed the fact that the Israelites were behaving as the Canaanites did. Ezekiel himself had said that the sufferings of the Exile were traceable to the persistent rebellion, idolatry, and unfaithfulness of former generations of Israelites (ch. 16). Now Ezekiel's hearers concluded that God was being

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<sup>15</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

<sup>16</sup> Block, the Book of Ezekiel, p 561

unfair in punishing them for their ancestors' sins. They may have cited what they thought was biblical support for this conclusion because even earlier the Lord had said that He would visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hated Him (Exod. 20:5; 34:6-7; Deut. 5:9).

It is true that the sins of parents result in consequences for their children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren that we might call the "fallout" of the parents' sins. But it is not correct to say that God "punishes" children because their parents have sinned. This is the conclusion that the Israelites in exile had drawn and that this chapter refutes (cf. Jer. 31:27-30; Lam. 5:7). True, some of what Ezekiel's hearers were experiencing were the consequences of the sins of former generations. But God was judging them personally because they were personally responsible for their actions that were sinful (cf. 3:16-21; 14:12-20; 33:1-20). God had revealed this principle of individual responsibility long ago (cf. Gen. 2:17; 4:7; Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6).<sup>17</sup>

An illustration of this important distinction may help. Suppose a child grew up in a home in which the parents had no respect for God and, therefore, set a very bad example for their child. The child would naturally follow their lead and learn some sinful attitudes and actions. His parents' influence would adversely taint the child's life. However, God would not take out His wrath on that child because of his parents' sins. He would rather deal with that child on the basis of his or her own attitudes and actions.

Parental influence extends beyond their actions to their characters and even perhaps to their genes. Children of an addicted parent, for example, often have a predisposition to the same or a similar addiction. Parents who have indulged their temptations to sexual promiscuity not infrequently see their own children grow up unusually vulnerable to this temptation. Parents with certain character flaws often note the same weaknesses in their children. Yet the child's will to follow God, enabled by His grace and Spirit, can overcome "hereditary sin."

### **Ezekiel 18:3**

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

**Clarke: As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel**—I will now, by this present declaration, settle this question for ever. And hence God has sworn to what follows. After this, who will dare to doubt the judgment pronounced?

**ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb**—because I will let it be seen by the whole world in the very fact that you are not righteous, as ye fancy yourselves, but wicked, and that you suffer only the just penalty of your guilt; while the elect righteous remnant alone escapes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See further, Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "How a Hermeneutical Virus Can Corrupt Theological Systems," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:663 (July-September 2009)

<sup>18</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:3). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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**McGee:** The word *live* or some form of it occurs thirteen times in this chapter, and the word *die* occurs fourteen times. We have life and death presented here, but it is not eternal life or eternal death that God is talking about. God is speaking of the way in which He judges individuals in this life. We need to look at this entire chapter from that viewpoint.<sup>20</sup>

**InDepth—Accountability** Sometimes warnings get twisted into excuses. The people of Ezekiel’s day, suffering from the consequences of a history of rebellion against God, found it easier to blame their ancestors for sin than to take responsibility for their own offenses. We can understand their predicament. Their immediate circumstances held little hope. News had reached Babylon of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. Plans to return to the Promised Land would be marred by descriptions of devastation. The wreckage of God’s judgment seemed too great to be restored. It was easier to sink into pessimism. The bitter proverb about sour grapes and teeth set on edge (18:2) became a slogan of resentment for the people. Instead of examining their own behavior before God, they excused their sin by blaming their parents.

The law of cause and effect may be obvious, but the exact connections sometimes elude us. Sin always has consequences. The second commandment (Ex. 20:4–6; Deut. 5:8–10) points out that the sin of idolatry (a sin from which flow many others) causes effects that can last generations. But Ezekiel had to remind the people that experiencing hardship as a consequence of the sins of ancestors was not the same as judgment for one’s own sins. Suffering caused by another’s sins does not excuse willfully sinful behavior.

God made it clear to the Israelites and also to us: We may suffer for someone else’s misdeeds, but we will be judged for our own. “I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways” (18:30). What should be our response? “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions” (18:30). This will lead to “a new heart and a new spirit” (18:31). Perhaps the clearest evidence of our fallen human nature can be heard in our quickness to blame others when we ought to examine ourselves and remember that we are accountable to God. His message to us is persistent: “Therefore turn and live!” (18:32).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 18:2). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>20</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>21</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

**Chuck Smith:** Every man is gonna be responsible to God for himself. When I stand before God, I'm gonna have to answer for only one person--me. I'm not gonna have to answer for my children or my wife, as close as we are. The only one I answer to God for is me. The only one God is gonna talk to me about is me. When you stand before God, you're only gonna be responsible for you. But you will be responsible for you. You're gonna have to answer to God for yourself. And you can't say, "Well, my dad was... " or, "My mom was... " You can't throw it off. You're gonna... the soul that sinneth, it shall die. And God isn't gonna punish your parents for what you are, nor is He going to punish you for what your parents were. Nor is He gonna reward you for what your parents were, or reward your parents for what you are, as the case may be. Each man stands before God as an individual and answers for himself. And it's time that you face up to that reality and you begin to be responsible before God, knowing that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for the things that we have done while we've been living in these bodies. Whether they be good or evil. Might as well prepare yourself.

**Constable:** The Lord instructed the people not to use this proverb in Israel any more. It implied something about God's dealings with them that was not true. No one can excuse his or her sinfulness on the basis of his or her ancestors. Human beings are free to make their own decisions, and we are responsible for the consequences of those decisions.

The implication is clear that man has the ability to determine his final condition. Other passages stress the sovereignty of God and may appear to contradict this clear revelation of human responsibility (e.g., Rom. 9; Eph. 1). Nevertheless both are true even though we cannot understand how both can be true. Their truthfulness lies in the truthfulness of the One who revealed them, not in our ability to comprehend them, which is limited by our humanity and obscured by our sinfulness.

### **Ezekiel 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.**

Before this chapter is over, we are going to read about three generations. Three characters are introduced here idiomatically: the father, the son, and the grandson. While he was giving this example idiomatically to make a point rhetorically, it is also reasonable that he might have had in mind 3 kings of Judah: Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah.

**[the soul that sinneth, it shall die]** This is the original death penalty expressed in other words (Genesis 2:17; Romans 1:29-32; Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6:14-23; Romans 8:12-13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).

**All souls are mine**—Equally so; I am the Father of the spirits of all flesh, and shall deal impartially with the whole.

**Clarke: The soul that sinneth, it shall die**—None shall die for another's crimes, none shall be saved by another's righteousness. Here is the general judgment relative to the

righteousness and unrighteousness of men, and the influence of one man's state on that of another; particularly in respect to their moral conduct.

**all souls are mine**—Therefore I can deal with all, being My own creation, as I please (Je 18:6). As the Creator of all alike I can have no reason, but the principle of equity, according to men's works, to make any difference, so as to punish some, and to save others (Ge 18:25). "The soul that sinneth it shall die." The curse descending from father to son assumes guilt shared in by the son; there is a natural tendency in the child to follow the sin of his father, and so he shares in the father's punishment: hence the principles of God's government, involved in Ex 20:5 and Je 15:4, are justified. The sons, therefore (as the Jews here), cannot complain of being unjustly afflicted by God (La 5:7); for they filled up the guilt of their fathers (Mt 23:32, 34–36). The same God who "recompenses the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children," is immediately after set forth as "giving to every man according to his ways" (Je 32:18, 19) which "visited the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" (where the explanation is added, "of them that *hate me*," that is, the *children hating God*, as well as their fathers: the former being too likely to follow their parents, sin going down with cumulative force from parent to child), we find (De 24:16), "the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither the children for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." The inherited guilt of sin in infants (Ro 5:14) is an awful *fact*, but one met by the atonement of Christ; but it is of adults that he speaks here. Whatever penalties fall on *communities* for connection with sins of their fathers, *individual* adults who repent shall escape (2Ki 23:25, 26). This was no new thing, as some misinterpret the passage here; it had been *always* God's principle to punish only the guilty, and not also the innocent, for the sins of their fathers. God does not here change the principle of His administration, but is merely about to *manifest* it so personally to each that the Jews should no longer throw on God and on their fathers the blame which was their own.<sup>22</sup>

**soul that sinneth, it shall die**—and it *alone* (Ro 6:23); not also the innocent.

**McGee:** God says here that all souls belong to Him. If the sins of the fathers come upon the children, it is because the children have followed the wickedness of their fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin. We read in Deuteronomy 24:16, "The 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."

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"—God will judge each individual.<sup>23</sup>

God will execute justice. The judgments within history look forward to the final judgment, when perfect justice will come (Rev. 20:11–21:8).

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<sup>22</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>23</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **OTS: Doctrine of Personal Responsibility (18:4–20).**

The basic principle of divine justice is simply this: “all souls are mine.” Each person is a separate entity before God. “The soul who sins will die.” Each person is accountable for his own life (18:4). After stating this basic principle, Ezekiel offered three illustrations of what he meant.

1. *The fate of a righteous man (18:5–9)*. A man who was righteous by the standards of the Old Testament law would live. Ezekiel cited sixteen identifying marks of a righteous man. Seven are negative characteristics, or things a righteous man did not do. A righteous man did not (1) eat on the mountains in pagan rituals; (2) lift up his eyes to idols; (3) defile his neighbor’s wife; (4) approach a menstruous woman; (5) oppress anyone through fraudulent dealings; (6) commit robbery; nor (7) lend money to a needy person on express condition of receiving interest. On the other hand, the righteous man possessed nine positive attributes. He (1) executes justice; (2) practices righteousness; (3) restores to the debtor his essential collateral; (4) feeds the hungry; (5) clothes the naked; (6) keeps his hand from iniquity; (7) executes true justice between men; (8) walks according to the law of God; and (9) deals faithfully, i.e., he is sincere.

2. *The fate of the wicked son (18:10–13)*. A righteous man might have a wicked son who was so violent that he actually shed blood. He was the exact opposite of his father. Concerning this man the verdict must be death! Although temporal judgment is in the forefront here, in the light of the New Testament the eternal consequences of his actions cannot be overlooked. His blood would be on him, i.e., he must bear full responsibility for his conduct.

3. *The fate of the righteous son (18:14–18)*. Occasionally a wicked man might have a son who repudiated the deeds of his father. He manifested all the characteristics of a righteous man. In no case would he die for the sins of the father. The wicked father, however, would “die for his iniquity” because he practiced extortion and robbery and “did what was not good among his people.”

The basic question, then, was this: “Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity?” Simply because God is impeccably fair. The son who was just, righteous and obedient to the law of God would live. “The soul that sins,” however, would die. “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.” Each person bears the ultimate responsibility for his own conduct. The “righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”<sup>24</sup>

**Sin, Responsibility**—The Old Testament emphasizes corporate responsibility for sin (see Jos 7:1-26) but places a stronger emphasis on individual responsibility. The exiles in Babylon tried to shift the responsibility for their suffering in the Exile to the sins of previous generations. Ezekiel lifted his prophetic cry against such reasoning to declare that we must each accept responsibility for our personal sins. This principle is maintained throughout Scripture. All persons are sinners without exception. Our inherited tendencies, our environment, our history, and our friends and relatives all lead us to sin. We have to bear suffering and unpleasant circumstances provoked by the sins of former generations. We may have reason to complain, but we do not have reason to blame. The Lamentations show how to take complaints to God. Ezekiel shows how to bear our responsibility. We

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 18:4–20). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

do not focus on our fathers' faults. We focus on God's call to us for religious loyalty, sexual faithfulness and purity, just treatment of other people including the poor and underprivileged, charity for the needy, respect for other people's property, fair judgment in decisions affecting other people, and obedience to God's will. When we live within this focus, we know we are rightly related to God. When we do not, we know we must seek forgiveness through our repentance and God's grace. We cannot draw benefits from our ancestors, nor can we pass on righteousness to our children. Each is personally responsible. Accepting such responsibility is not a onetime act but a daily relationship with God. Refusing responsibility means death.<sup>25</sup>

The exiles' problematic doctrines and attitudes became evident from God's corrective teaching. Apparently the exiles were filled with despair and had a fatalistic approach to such truisms as the proverb quoted in v. 2 (as also in 16:44) and to related Scriptures (see Ex. 20:5; 34:6, 7; Deut. 5:9). Their false belief was that they were being punished for the sins of previous generations. Their sin was that of becoming insensitive and irresponsible, since they thought judgment would come regardless of what they might do. God's reply reminded them that it had always been otherwise: only the individual person **who sins** will die. In this verse, the physical, earthly consequences of sinful behavior are being addressed (see 3:16–21; 33:12–20; Deut. 30:15–20).

**Constable:** The true principle, in contrast to their proverb, was that everyone is personally responsible to God, the present generation and former generations. We bear the guilt of our own sinfulness, which results in our death, not the guilt of someone else (cf. 3:18–21). "Souls" (Heb. *nephesh*) means "lives" (cf. 13:20), not disembodied spirits.

The story of Achan in Josh 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 Exod 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).

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<sup>25</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

### **The illustrations 18:5-18**

Three cases illustrate this principle: a father doing right (vv. 5-9), his son doing evil (vv. 10-13), and his grandson doing right (vv. 14-18). In each case Ezekiel described the individual's actions and the Lord's responses.

### **Ezekiel 18:5**

**But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,**

Paul talks about the term “just” in Philippians 3:6. The heart and attitudes are revealed in a person’s conduct. It is not talking about righteousness in the sense that he kept the law perfectly.

**[But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right ...]** The 16-fold righteousness of a holy man (Dake):

1. He is just (Ezekiel 18:5,9).
2. He does that which is lawful and right.
3. He has not eaten upon the mountains (in idolatrous worship, Ezekiel 18:6).
4. He has not lifted up his eyes to idols.
5. He has not defiled his neighbor's wife.
6. He has not come near a menstruous woman.
7. He has not oppressed any man (Ezekiel 18:7).
8. He has restored the pledge to the debtor.
9. He has spoiled no man by violence.
10. He has given his bread to the hungry.
11. He has covered the naked with garments.
12. He has not lent money on interest (Ezekiel 18:8; Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20).
13. He has not taken any increase.
14. He has withdrawn his hand from iniquity.
15. He has executed true judgment between man and man.
16. He has walked in God's statutes, to deal truly in all things.

Here begins the illustration of God’s impartiality in a series of supposed cases. The first case is given in Ez 18:5–9, the just man. The excellencies are selected in reference to the prevailing sins of the age, from which such a one stood aloof; hence arises the omission of some features of righteousness, which, under different circumstances, would have been desirable to be enumerated. Each age has *its own* besetting temptations, and the just man will be distinguished by his guarding against the peculiar defilements, inward and outward, of his age.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:5). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**5-9** In this picture of the righteous man we see the obligations of right living. A general statement about the man’s righteousness (v. 6) is followed by the description of his practice of piety, his chastity, and his beneficence (vv. 7, 8), as rooted in obedience to the commands of God (v. 9). For similar lists of virtues, see Ps 15; 24:3-6; Isa 58:5-7; Job 31. A good man’s outward conduct is a revelation of his inner character, the result of obedience to God.<sup>27</sup>

**5-6** Ezekiel then presented three “cases” to prove the principle of individual responsibility. Each hypothetical situation begins with Suppose (vv. 5, 10, 14). The cases are those of a righteous man who does right (vv. 5-9), a violent son of a righteous father (vv. 10-13), and a righteous son of a violent father (vv. 14-18). In each Ezekiel described the individual’s actions and God’s response.

The first hypothetical case was that of a man who was righteous and who followed God’s Law with all his heart (vv. 5-9). He was not guilty of idolatry. He did not eat at the mountain shrines (cf. 8:12; 16:24-25, 31, 39; 18:15; 22:9) or look to the idols. The “mountain shrines” were the high places scattered throughout Israel where idolatry was practiced (see comments on 6:3-7). The “idols” were the foreign images being worshiped by the people (cf. chap. 8; 16:20-25).<sup>28</sup>

**McGee 5-9:** “Hath not eaten upon the mountains”—he has not engaged in idolatry. This man is a just man who has walked in God’s statutes and kept His ordinances. “He shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.” He is talking about this life, not eternal life. God will bless him in this life—this is the blessing of the Old Testament.<sup>29</sup>

**ESV, Three Case Studies:** Ezekiel exemplifies his teaching by means of three generations: a righteous father (vv. 5–9) and his wicked son (vv. 10–13), who in turns fathers a righteous son (vv. 14–18). Each paragraph follows the same format—the behavior and moral character is introduced, illustrated by a list of characteristic actions, and concluded by a statement regarding either life or death, as appropriate. There are obvious resonances with the Ten Commandments, but not so close as to suggest Ezekiel is citing them. Other such lists appear in Psalms 15 and 24; cf. also Job’s declaration of innocence in Job 31.<sup>30</sup>

**Christian Ethics, Character**—Compare Ps 15; 24; Job 31; Zec 7:8-10. God judges individuals for their own wickedness or righteousness. This was not a totally new emphasis in the predominantly corporate framework seen in the Old Testament. Rather, it is a reemphasis needed in Ezekiel’s generation and our own. Basic to character development is the commitment to take responsibility for and to repent of sins. The godly person worships only God, respects marriage vows, helps the poor instead of causing

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<sup>27</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 18:5). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>28</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:5). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>29</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>30</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

their poverty, does not rob, engages in fair economic practices, mediates between people fairly, and makes God's teaching the guide of life.<sup>31</sup>

**5-9:** A righteous man—a father or the first generation—is lawful. He does what is morally right according to the Law of Moses. He does not participate in the following sins: (1) idolatrous ceremonial meals, (2) sexual misconduct, (3) mistreatment of the poor, (4) theft, or (5) usury, charging interest on debts owed by fellow Hebrews (Deut. 23:20). His reward is life (Ex. 20; Lev. 18:1–5; Deut. 5; 11). during her impurity: In ancient Israel, intimacy during the woman's menstrual period was prohibited. The Old Testament does not explain the reason for this, but it may be tied to the special role of blood for the atoning of sin (Lev. 15:19–33). The principal point in this passage is that the person was observing the standards laid down by the Law.<sup>32</sup>

### **The case of the righteous father 18:5-9 (Constable)**

**Constable: 18:5-6** If a person behaved righteously and obeyed the Mosaic Law, that person would live. This is the basic point. Evidence of righteousness before God was typically obedience to specific commands in the Law. The Lord cited five types of behavior that manifested departure from the will of God under the Mosaic Law.

First, eating ceremonial meals at idol shrines and trusting in idols were forbidden but practiced by the Jews in Ezekiel's day (cf. Deut. 12:2-4). This was a violation of the first four commandments in the Decalogue that required exclusive allegiance to Yahweh.

Second, committing adultery and having sex with a woman during her menstrual period were practiced even though God prohibited them (Exod. 20:14; Lev. 15:24; 18:19; 20:10, 18; Deut. 22:22). The prohibition against having intercourse with one's wife during her period was clear in the Mosaic Law, but when Jesus terminated that code as the basis for believers' conduct this law no longer remained binding on believers (Heb. 7:11-12). The New Covenant teaching of believers' present duties says nothing about this practice. It is now a matter of choice (liberty) for believers.

This and the following three cases are examples of the fifth through the tenth commandments that specify how one should treat other people. With regard to himself, the righteous man maintained his moral and ceremonial purity even in the privacy of his marital life.

### **Ezekiel 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,***

There is nothing wrong with eating a sandwich on a hill. That is NOT what God was talking about. "Upon the mountains" here had reference to the places where their idol worshiping was conducted; and eating of that implied the partaking in the idol festivities and rites. The context here was that partaking in those rituals which were part of the idol worship system that had been introduced (Deut 12:13-14). The respecting of marriage

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<sup>31</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

<sup>32</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

rights is emphasized in Ex 20:14; Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22. Laws respecting unclean women are dealt with in Lev 15:24; 18:19; and 20:18.<sup>33</sup>

Idolatrous worship was generally performed on mountains and hills; and those who offered sacrifices feasted on the sacrifice, and thus held communion with the idol.

**Neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols:** Has paid them no religious adoration; has trusted in them for nothing, and has not made prayer nor supplication before them.

**Neither hath defiled his neighbor's wife**—Has had no adulterous connection with any woman; to which idolatrous feasts and worship particularly led.

**Neither hath come nigh to a menstruous woman**—Has abstained from the use of the marriage-bed during the periodical indisposition of his wife. This was absolutely forbidden by the law; and both the man and the woman who disobeyed the command were to be put to death, Leviticus 20:18. For which Calmet gives this reason: “It has been believed, and experience confirms it, that the children conceived at such times are either leprous, or monsters, or deformed by their diminutiveness, or by the disproportion of their members.” There are other reasons for this law, should those of the learned commentator be found invalid.

**not eaten upon ... mountains**—the high places, where altars were reared. A double sin: sacrificing elsewhere than at the temple, where only God sanctioned sacrifice (De 12:13, 14); and this to idols instead of to Jehovah. “Eaten” refers to the feasts which were connected with the sacrifices (see Ex 32:6; De 32:38; Jdg 9:27; 1Co 8:4, 10; 10:7).<sup>34</sup>

**lifted ... eyes to**—namely, in adoration (Ps 121:1). The superstitious are compared to harlots; their eyes go eagerly after spiritual lusts. The righteous man not merely refrains from the act, but from the *glance* of spiritual lust (Job 31:1; Mt 5:28).

**Hath not eaten** sacrificial meals to false gods **upon the mountains** nor **lifted up his eyes** in prayer to idols (cf. 6:4). A righteous man abstains from adultery and impurity (Lev 15:19-30). 7, 8. **Hath restored to the debtor his pledge.** Cf. Ex 22:26; Deut 24:6; Job 22:6, Amos 2:8. **Does not lend at interest** (RSV). Jews were forbidden to take interest from their needy brethren (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:25-37; Deut 23:19) but were permitted interest on loans to foreigners (Deut 23:20). Nor **hath taken any increase;** i.e., more than was lent. 9. The MT reads, “And my judgments he has kept to do *truth* (*.emet*), which the LXX renders, “to do them” (*ôtām*). **He shall surely live.** This contrasts with verse 4.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

<sup>34</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:6). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>35</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 18:6–10). Chicago: Moody Press.

**6b-8a** The righteous man was also careful to keep the portions of the Law pertaining to his fellow Israelites. He kept himself morally pure. Both adultery (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 20:10) and intercourse during the menstrual period (Lev. 18:19) were prohibited by the Mosaic Law. The righteous man in Ezekiel's hypothetical case faithfully maintained sexual purity.

Ezekiel's model Israelite was also careful not to oppress his fellow Israelites. He would not keep collateral for a loan which the borrower needed (cf. Ex. 22:26; Deut. 24:6). He would never commit robbery, or forcibly take anything from a fellow Israelite (Ex. 20:15). He did the opposite; he gave food and clothing to the needy. His concern was how he could help others, not what he could get from them.

If this righteous man loaned something to a fellow Israelite, he did not try to profit on the deal by usury (an exorbitant interest rate). Take excessive interest could be translated "take interest" (NIV marg.) in light of the first part of the sentence. The Law prohibited any charging of interest on loans made to fellow Israelites (Deut. 23:19-20); this man carefully followed the Law. He put God's Law ahead of financial gain.<sup>36</sup>

### **Ezekiel 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;**

Restoring the debtor's pledge is dealt with in Ex 22; Deut 24:10-13; Amos 2:8 and other places. Isa 58:7 is one of the verses about distributing food to the hungry.

**Hath restored to the debtor his pledge**—Has carefully surrendered the pawn or pledge when its owner came to redeem it. As the pledge is generally of more worth than that for which it is pledged, an unprincipled man will make some pretense to keep it; which is highly abominable in the sight of God.

**Hath spoiled none by violence**—Either by robbery or personal insult. For a man may be spoiled both ways.

**Hath given his bread to the hungry**—Has been kind-hearted and charitable; especially to them that are in the deepest want.

**Hath covered the naked with a garment**—Has divided both his bread and his clothing with the necessitous. These are two branches of the same root.

**restored ... pledge**—that which the poor debtor absolutely needed; as his raiment, which the creditor was bound to restore before sunset (Ex 22:26, 27), and his millstone, which was needed for preparing his food (De 24:6, 10–13).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:6). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>37</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:7). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**bread to ... hungry ... covered ... naked**—(Is 58:7; Mt 25:35, 36). After duties of justice come those of benevolence. It is not enough to refrain from doing a wrong to our neighbor, we must also do him good. The bread owned by a man, though “his,” is given to him, not to keep to himself, but to impart to the needy.<sup>38</sup>

**Constable:** Third, oppressing others and not returning something given as collateral when someone returned what he had borrowed were violations of the covenant (Exod. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:6). This is an example of life within the covenant community but outside the marriage relationship. Fourth, not robbing but instead providing food and clothing to the needy were commanded (Deut. 15:11; 24:19-22; cf. Isa. 58:7). Both of the examples in this verse deal with one's relationships to the neighbor inside and outside Israel. Both examples also specify the correct action in contrast to the incorrect.

### **Ezekiel 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,**

Usury signifies, with us, exacting unlawful interest for money; and taking the advantage of a man's necessities to advance him cash on exorbitant profit. This bites the receiver in his property, and the lender in his salvation.

**Neither hath taken any increase**—In lending has not required more than was lent; and has not taken that product of the cash lent, which was more than the value for its use. This may be a part of the tenth article.

**That hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity**—Never associates with those who act contrary to justice and equity; his hand or influence being never found among evil workers.

**Hath executed true judgment between man and man**—Being neither swayed by prejudice, fear, nor favor.

These thirteen points concern his social and civil relations.

The Law of Moses had rules about charging interest (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36; Deut. 23:19-20) to prevent God's people from taking advantage of the poor or of fellow Israelites.

**usury**—literally, “biting.” The law forbade the Jew to take interest from brethren but permitted him to do so from a foreigner (Ex 22:25; De 23:19, 20; Ne 5:7; Ps 15:5). The letter of the law was restricted to the Jewish polity, and is not binding now; and indeed the principle of taking interest was even then sanctioned, by its being allowed in the case

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<sup>38</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:7). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

of a foreigner. The *spirit* of the law still binds us, that we are not to take advantage of our neighbor's necessities to enrich ourselves, but be satisfied with moderate, or even no, interest, in the case of the needy.<sup>39</sup>

**8b-9** This righteous person was compassionate (not doing wrong) and fair (judging fairly between man and man). He faithfully kept the highest standards of conduct demanded by God's laws for His covenant people.

The righteous Israelite would surely live. He would be spared from judgment (cf. 14:12-20) and would not suffer for the sins of others. The vast majority of Jerusalem's inhabitants were *not* righteous. Therefore the implication is that they would be punished for their sins.<sup>40</sup>

**Constable:** Fifth, not charging interest of other Israelites or practicing iniquity but providing true justice and faithfully doing all that God required of His people further represented doing God's will. The selfishness of the Jewish usurers cut to the very heart of their sinfulness. Again, God specified correct conduct as well as condemning sin (cf. v. 7).

### **Ezekiel 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.**

So the first character introduced here idiomatically is one I am going to call "The Just Grandfather." As you can get the tone of here, he is a just man. The son is going to be ungodly: a robber, a murderer, and a lot of other horrible things. But then the grandson, vv. 14-18, is going to be just, and that point is to put to silence the idea that you are being punished for your father's sins. He is giving you this example.<sup>41</sup>

**[he is just, he shall surely live]** (Dake) The man who practices all the above things is just, and he shall surely live; but this would be difficult for a man in himself, having no help from the Lord. One who accepts Christ and His salvation, becoming a new creature, does that which is lawful and right; and through grace and faith he conforms to the gospel readily. That men had the gospel in O.T. days is clear from Romans 4; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:2.

**Hath walked in my statutes**—Not only acknowledging them to be right, but acting according to them. Especially in every thing that relates to my worship, changing nothing, neglecting nothing.

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<sup>39</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:8). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>40</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:8). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>41</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, [khouse.org](http://khouse.org)

**And hath kept my judgments, to deal truly**—Has attended to my Divine direction, both with respect to things forbidden, and things commanded. These concern men in their religious conduct.

**He is just**—*tsaddik hu*. He is a righteous man; he has given to all their due; he has abstained from every appearance of evil, and done that which was lawful and right in the sight of God.

**He shall surely live**—He has lived to me, and he shall live with me. Literally, “live in life.” Prosper in this life, but still more in the life to come (Pr 3:1, 2; Am 5:4).

**ESV:** The granting of life to the righteous in the short run prefigures the granting of eternal life. The gift of eternal life comes only through perfect righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:23–26; 6:23).<sup>42</sup>

**Constable:** In sum, the Israelite who lived by the Mosaic standards was righteous in behavior and could anticipate a long life of blessing from God (Lev. 18:1-5; Deut. 11; 26:16-19; 30:15-20; cf. Phil. 3:6). Clearly one's attitudes and actions toward other people demonstrate his or her attitudes and actions toward God.

### **Ezekiel 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*,**

**[If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood ...] (Dake)** Twelve sins of the wicked:

1. Robbery (Ezekiel 18:10)
2. Shedding of blood
3. Refusing to do his duty (Ezekiel 18:11)
4. Eating upon the mountain in idolatrous worship
5. Defiling a neighbor's wife
6. Oppressing the poor and needy (Ezekiel 18:12)
7. Spoiling by violence
8. Not restoring the pledge to a debtor
9. Lifting up eyes to idols
10. Committing abomination
11. Lending money for interest to a brother (see Ezekiel 18:13; Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20)
12. Taking increase from a neighbor

**If he beget a son**—Who is the reverse of the above righteous character, according to the thirteen articles already specified and explained.

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<sup>42</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

**10-13** Ezekiel moved to his second hypothetical situation. **Suppose** the righteous man **has a rebellious (violent) son** who commits sins his **father** had avoided (cf. vv. 11-13a with vv. 8-9).

God's verdict on this man was unfavorable. He would **be put to death and his blood would be on his own head**. The father's righteousness would not benefit his son (cf. 14:16, 18). This confirmed the fallacy of the people's proverb (18:2) and the truth of God's principle (v. 4).<sup>43</sup>

### **Constable: The case of the wicked son 18:10-13**

Such a righteous person might have an unrighteous son who violently shed the blood of others. This son might do all the bad things that his father avoided doing and might fail to do all the good things that his father did. He would die for his own sins; the responsibility for his death would be his own.

### **Ezekiel 18:11**

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

### **Ezekiel 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,**

Returning what one took in pledge referred to the lender letting the debtor use the cloak each night that he has placed as security on his loan. Without the cloak, the debtor would be cold at night. (See Exodus 22:26 and Deut. 24:10-13 for the giving of this law.)

**oppressed the poor**—an aggravation to his oppressions, that they were practised against *the poor*; whereas in Ez 18:7 the expression is simply “oppressed *any*.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Ezekiel 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.**

It was lawful to charge interest to foreigners, but not within the House of Israel. Interest was prohibited.

**[he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him]** (Dake) "He shall not live ... he shall surely die; his blood will be

<sup>43</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:10–13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>44</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:12). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

upon him." These three statements—made by God, not man—truly mean that regardless of what is sometimes taught, the man who does these things, whether he has ever had an experience of salvation or not, will surely die and not live. No condition is laid down here other than if a man does these things he will die, and if he does not do them he will live (Ezekiel 18:5,9,10,13).

**Shall he then live?**—Because his father was a righteous man, shall the father's holiness be imputed to him? No!

**He shad surely die; his blood shall be upon him**—He shall suffer for his own crimes.

### **Ezekiel 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,**

The third case: a son who walks not in the steps of an unrighteous father, but in the ways of God; for example, Josiah, the pious son of guilty Amon; Hezekiah, of Ahaz (2Ki 16:1–20; 18:1–37; 21:1–22:20).

**seeth ... and considereth**—The same *Hebrew* stands for both verbs, “seeth ... yea, seeth.” The repetition implies the attentive observation needed, in order that the son may not be led astray by his father's bad example; as sons generally are blind to parents sins, and even imitate them as if they were virtues.<sup>45</sup>

**[if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like ...]** (Dake) Twelve conditions of life:

1. If he has not eaten upon the mountains in idolatrous worship (Ezekiel 18:15)
2. If he has not lifted up his eyes to idols of the house of Israel
3. If he has not defiled his neighbor's wife
4. If he has not oppressed any (Ezekiel 18:16)
5. If he has not withheld the pledge from the debtor
6. If he has not spoiled anyone by violence
7. If he has given his bread to the hungry
8. If he has covered the naked with a garment
9. If he has taken off his hand from the poor to relieve him (Ezekiel 18:17)
10. If he has not received usury nor increase (from a brother; cp. Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20)
11. If he has executed My judgments
12. If he has walked in My statutes

**Clarke: Now, lo, if he beget a son that seeth all his father's sins—and considereth**—Lays to heart the evil of his father's life, and the dreadful consequences of a life of rebellion against God.

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<sup>45</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:14). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**Clarke: And doeth not such like**—Is quite a different man in moral feeling and character; and acts up to the thirteen points already laid down.

**14-20** Ezekiel's third case continued to follow this hypothetical family. Suppose (cf. "suppose" in vv. 5, 10) this wicked son has a son who sees all the sins of his father but does not do such things himself. Instead of following in the sin of his father, this son followed in the righteous path of his grandfather (cf. vv. 15-16 with vv. 6-9).

God's conclusion is obvious: He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. A righteous son will not be punished for his father's evil deeds. But his father will die for his own sin. The proverb being quoted (v. 2) was incorrect. When the people were judged, it was not for the sins of someone in a former generation. Only those who remained faithful to God would be delivered (v. 19). (By the word live Ezekiel meant escaping punishment in this life. See comments on v. 24.) Ezekiel then repeated his point: The soul who sins is the one who will die (v. 20; cf. v. 4).<sup>46</sup>

A son may decide not to follow in the footsteps of his wicked father. There were several instances of this in the history of Israel. Old Ahaz was a wicked king, but his son Hezekiah led in a revival. Josiah was a wonderful man, and he had a very wicked father.

#### **Constable: The case of the righteous grandson 18:14-18**

This sinful son might have a son who observed his father's behavior and chose to follow the example of his righteous grandfather rather than that of his unrighteous father. He refrained from the same evil practices and engaged in the same forms of goodness. That man would surely live for his righteousness whereas his father would die for his wickedness. Wicked parents do not necessarily produce wicked children because the children can choose to do right. The Israelites had illustrations of this alternation of good and evil individuals in succeeding generations even in the royal family. King Hezekiah, for example, was good, his son Manasseh was bad, and Manasseh's grandson Josiah was good.

. . . in this world God does indeed punish entire *groups* for the sins that they *as groups* commit, even when some members of the group may be innocent. Such groups are often nations, cities, or other political entities, but they may also be societal groups such as priests or prophets, or economic groups such as businesses or trade guilds, or such voluntary associations as churches.

#### **Ezekiel 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,***

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<sup>46</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:14–20). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

### **Ezekiel 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,**

### **Ezekiel 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.**

[**he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live**] (Dake) "He shall not die ... he shall surely live" (Ezekiel 18:14-17). The passage means what it says—that if one commits these sins he will die, and if he refused to commit them he will live. See note, Ezekiel 18:13.

**Clarke:** He shall not die for the iniquity of his father—He shall no more be affected by his father's crimes, than his father was benefited by his grandfather's righteousness.

### **Ezekiel 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.**

[**As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people**] (Dake): Every man—father or son—to die:

1. If and because he cruelly oppressed
2. If and because he spoiled his brother by violence
3. If and because he did that which was not good among his people

[**even he shall die in his iniquity**] He will not live if he is guilty of the wickedness stated here and does not repent and turn from his evil ways.

**McGee:** God is saying that each man is judged in this life for the way he lives his life. Remember that He is not speaking of eternal life but about judgment here and now. He wants Israel to know this is the basis on which he intends to judge them.<sup>47</sup>

### **The first objection: God's conduct 18:19-23**

God proceeded to adopt a dialogical teaching style in which He both asked and answered questions about individual responsibility. This style is quite similar to the Greek diatribe, which Paul used frequently in his writings (e.g., in Romans).

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<sup>47</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## **Ezekiel 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.**

[**Yet say ye ...**] (Dake) Israel found it difficult to reconcile this revelation with the law of Moses which said that God would visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:4-5; Deut. 5:9). They failed to get the message of the entire truth which said, "of them that hate Me." If the children hated God as their father did, then sins would be passed upon children, not because of their being children of a wicked father, but because of their own personal sins and walking in the sins of the father. That is all God emphasized here. A righteous father will live by his own righteousness (Ezekiel 18:5-9); a wicked father will die for his own sins (Ezekiel 18:18); a righteous son will live for his own righteousness (Ezekiel 18:14-17); and a wicked son will die for his own sins (Ezekiel 18:10-13).

[**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**] (Dake) Again God emphasizes the perfectly just fact that when the son has done that which is lawful and right—has kept all My statutes, and has done them—he shall surely live and not die. God would be unjust if He destroyed a son who had met all these conditions, if He judged and sent him to eternal hell only because he had a wicked father; yet this is what Israel was questioning here.

**Yet say ye.** See also verses 25, 29; 33:17, 20; Mal 1:2; and frequent occurrences in Malachi. Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? Ezekiel points out that neither son nor father will be held responsible for the other's iniquity, but each person is individually responsible to God.<sup>48</sup>

**ESV 19–29 Two Objections:** The words **yet you say** (vv. 19, 25) introduce two objections from Ezekiel's exilic audience. Again, "you" is plural. Another edition of this teaching appears in 33:10–20.<sup>49</sup>

**Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?** Ezekiel anticipates his audience clinging to their traditional understanding encapsulated in the now defunct proverb (vv. 1–2).

**Constable:** The Israelites were claiming that a righteous son (themselves) would die for his father's (their ancestors') wickedness. But this was not true. Individuals who practiced righteousness would experience God's covenant promise of blessing on their lives even though their fathers practiced wickedness. People die for their own sins, not for the sins of their fathers or the sins of their sons. Likewise people who behave righteously experience the consequences of their personal conduct just as people who

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<sup>48</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 18:19). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>49</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

behave unrighteously do. Jeremiah, for example, did not die in the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem.

It is true that we are sinners not only because we practice sin personally (Rom. 3:23; 6:23) but also because we were born with a sinful human nature that we inherited from our parents (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3; Gal. 5:17) and because God imputed the sin of Adam to us (Rom. 5:12-21). However here the point is that people do not die for the sins of their parents, grandparents, children, or grandchildren but for their own sins.

### **Ezekiel 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.**

[**The soul that sinneth, it shall die**] Still again God emphasizes the fact that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" and not live (Ezekiel 18:4,20).

[**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**] (Dake) As also expressed in other statements of the passage the conditions of life and death are made clear—who will die and who will live.

**Clarke: The soul that sinneth, it shall die**—Hitherto we have had to do with the simple cases or the righteous and the wicked; of him who lived and died a holy man, and of him who lived and died a wicked man. But there are two cases behind:

1. That of the wicked man, who repents and turns to God.
2. That of the righteous man, who backslides, and does not return to God by repentance. On both these cases God decides thus:—

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” We have this twice in this chapter—here and in verse 4.

**ESV: 20–24 The soul who sins shall die.** Verses 21–24 explain this teaching in what might seem a surprising way for Ezekiel. Verses 21–22 consider the wicked person who then repents and lives rightly before God. Verse 24 considers the opposite scenario. Sandwiched between these is the central declaration of God’s “pleasure” (v. 23) in repentance, and a denial that he has any pleasure in the death of the wicked<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1524). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

## **Ezekiel 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.**

He is speaking about God's judgment being equitable person to person.

**[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]** (Dake) After stating that the soul who sins shall die, the Lord promptly makes it clear that the sinner does not need to remain dead in trespasses and sins. He can live if he wants to mend his ways. If and when the wicked will turn from his sins that he has committed, keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All the transgressions he has committed will be blotted out; they shall not be mentioned to him. In his righteousness which he has done since turning from sin he shall live (Ezekiel 18:21-22). God has no pleasure that the wicked should die, but "that he should return from his wicked ways, and live" (Ezekiel 18:23).

**Clarke: But if the wicked will turn from all his sins**—And afterwards walk according to the character of the righteous already specified shall he find mercy, and be for ever saved? YES.

Two last cases, showing the equity of God: (1) The penitent sinner is dealt with according to his new obedience, not according to his former sins. (2) The righteous man who turns from righteousness to sin shall be punished for the latter, and his former righteousness will be of no avail to him.<sup>51</sup>

The sinner is free to repent and turn from sin and do God's will. Contrast the idea in Hos 5:4; Jer 13:23. 22. In his righteousness. Cf. verse 24; 33:16. 23. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? This question reflects God's mercy and his desire to save all. "The most precious word in the whole Book of Ezekiel" (Kraetzschmar). Cf. verse 32; 33:11; I Tim 2:4; II Pet 3:9.<sup>52</sup>

**21-23** However, escape from judgment was possible. Sinners could avoid judgment if they repented of their sins by turning from them (cf. Prov. 28:13) and kept God's decrees. Ezekiel was not teaching salvation by works. First, he was speaking of a temporal deliverance from Babylon's armies rather than eternal deliverance from the second death (Ezek. 18:13). Second, he clearly indicated that these righteous works would spring only from a "new heart and a new spirit" (v. 31). Good works result from a changed life; they do not bring about such a change.

Why would God allow a sinner who repented to avoid judgment? The answer lies in God's character. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (cf. v. 32). Instead, He is pleased when they turn from their ways. God is not a petty despot who holds grudges and

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<sup>51</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:21). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>52</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 18:21). Chicago: Moody Press.

longs to inflict punishment on those who wrong Him. As a God of grace He longs for people to forsake their wickedness and turn to His righteous ways.<sup>53</sup>

This is an O.T. prefiguring of conversion (cf. John 3:1-15; 2 Cor 5:17). God will deal justly with anyone who turns to Him from his sin in repentance and faith, regardless of his past sins or the sins of his forefathers (Rom 5:6-11; Eph 2:1-8; Col 1:20-22; 2 Pet 3:9).

### **OTS: Doctrine of Free Will (18:21–32).**

Men are not locked into a life of sin. They can change. A wicked man can turn from all his sins. He may determine to live his life by the Book, i.e., the law of God, and to deal justly and righteously with his fellow man. The penalty for that man would be canceled. None of his transgressions would be remembered against him. Because of his righteousness he would live. God had no delight in the death of the wicked. On the contrary, the Lord has always delighted to see a wicked man turn from his evil way (18:21–23).

A righteous man may choose to turn from his righteousness to iniquity, to all the abominations of the wicked. Such a man's righteousness would not be remembered because of his "treachery." He would die in his sin (18:24).

This raised the objection that "the way of the Lord is not right." The argument seems to be that if a man once saved is subsequently lost, then God is inconsistent. Ezekiel responded to this argument decisively. God's ways were consistent; Israel's ways were inconsistent. Backsliders would die in their sin. Penitent sinners would live. God would judge each individual separately. A man's fate is determined by his own free choices (18:25–30a).

The doctrine of free will implies that a sinner can repent. Ezekiel concluded this section of his book with a strong appeal for repentance. He urged Israel to "return," to go back to the point where they got off the path. He exhorted those who repented to cause others to turn from their transgressions. He called upon his audience to "cast away" all their transgressions. On the positive side, he encouraged them to make for themselves "a new heart and a new spirit," i.e., develop a firm resolve to be faithful and obedient. The alternative to such repentance was death. Yet God did not delight in the death of the wicked. Therefore, he urged them one last time to repent so that they might live (18:30b–32).<sup>54</sup>

**Chuck Smith 21-23:** God is so maligned in the minds of people. As people look upon God as some kind of a vengeful character who is just waiting to cast people into hell. Not so. God is so patient, so long-suffering. He'll do anything to keep a person out of hell. He has done everything to keep a person out. He even sent His only begotten Son to bear all of our sins to make it so easy to get into heaven. And to get into hell, you have to go against the grace of God, the love of God. You have to despise His Son Jesus Christ, turn your back upon the provisions of God and really, you have to in a sense, cross over the body of Jesus Christ to get into hell. Because He stands in your way to block you. And

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<sup>53</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:21–23). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 18:21–32). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

you've got to shove Him aside. It's not easy to get to hell. You've got to fight God every step, conviction of God's Holy Spirit. But if you're stubborn enough and hang in there, you can make it.

**Constable:** If a wicked person repented of his wickedness and pursued righteous behavior, he would live and not die. God would pardon his sins because he had turned from them and practiced righteousness. For the Jews still in Jerusalem this might mean deliverance from death at the hands of Babylon's invading soldiers.

This did not mean that doing good works would atone for past sins eternally. It meant that doing good works could preclude God's judgment of premature physical death, a judgment promised under the Mosaic Law for those who practiced wickedness. This whole chapter deals with the consequences of good and bad conduct *in this life* under the Mosaic Covenant. It does not deal with the subject of eternal life. Eternal life has always come to a person by faith alone (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9).

The stipulations of the Mosaic covenant were given to a people who were already in a trusting relationship with God. These stipulations provided a concrete, practical outworking of faith in the God who redeemed Israel from Egypt and gave the people his law. . . . If they obeyed these commands, they would show their righteousness, receive God's blessings, and live. But if they failed to live according to God's ways as revealed in the law, the Mosaic covenant declared that even those who had believed . . . would die physically (cf. Deut 28:58-66; 30:15-20).

### **Ezekiel 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.**

**Clarke:** All his transgressions—Shall be so completely forgiven by God's mercy, that they shall not be even mentioned to him; and if he live and die in this recovered state, he shall live with God to all eternity. And why? Hear the reason:—

### **Ezekiel 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?**

This is a call to repentance.

**Clarke:** Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?—No! That is foreign to him whose name is love, and whose nature is mercy. On the contrary he “wills that he should return from his evil ways and live.”

And if God can have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, he cannot have made a decree to abandon him to the evil of his nature, and then damn him for what he could not avoid: for as God can do nothing with which he is not pleased, so he can decree nothing with which he is not pleased. But he is “not pleased with the death of a sinner,” therefore he cannot have made a decree to bring him to this death.

**LAN:** God is a God of love, but he is also a God of perfect justice. His perfect love causes him to be merciful to those who recognize their sin and turn back to him, but he cannot wink at those who willfully sin. Wicked people die both physically and spiritually. God takes no joy in their deaths; he would prefer that they turn to him and have eternal life. Likewise, we should not rejoice in the misfortunes of nonbelievers. Instead, we should do all in our power to bring them to faith.

(1Ti 2:4; 2Pe 3:9). If men perish, it is because they *will not* come to the Lord for salvation; not that the Lord is not willing to save them (Jn 5:40). They trample on not merely justice, but mercy; what farther hope can there be for them, when even mercy is against them? (Heb 10:26–29).<sup>55</sup>

God is both righteous and loving, both just and merciful simultaneously. Though the death of the wicked was necessary and inevitable because of their rejection of God and disobedience of His law, that death was not by arbitrary divine decree but rather was the choice of the individual. God created man with the responsibility to choose right or wrong and to accept the consequences. God wants every man to obey Him and choose life. He has no desire for man's destruction, but He cannot fail to uphold His own righteous laws. God will not save except through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>56</sup>

**Constable:** Why would God allow a sinner who repented to avoid judgment? The answer lies in God's character.

God explained that He took no delight in people dying because of their sins. What gave Him pleasure was their turning from their sinful conduct and so continuing to live.

Such a longing should be shared by every preacher who ventures to speak about the judgment of God.

### **The second objection: God's justice 18:24-29**

The Jews to whom Ezekiel ministered went beyond questioning God's conduct. They also questioned His justice.

#### **Ezekiel 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.**

**Missler:** Ezekiel's context here is the practical idea of having your attitude right to the Lord and the concept of repentance. You might start off well, but then turn to sin; you will die in your sins. He was dealing here at the practical, physical level.

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<sup>55</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 18:23). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>56</sup> Believer's Study Bible

Ezekiel was attempting to get across the idea that they were going to be in control of their own destinies by their actions before the Lord. When he says ‘righteous’ he is not assuming the person is totally free from sin. He was saying his heart was right with the Lord, and in the light he had he was attempting to walk in the Lord’s statutes, and that would be counted to him equitably.

The burden Ezekiel has here is that the people recognize that they have control of their own destiny, independent of who their father might have been, or what kind of life he led. That is the point. The emphasis is on individual accountability.

After showing how the wicked can live and not die, God shows how a righteous man could die and not live.

**Clarke: When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness**—Here is the second case. Can a man who was once holy and pure fall away so as to perish everlastingly? YES. For God says, “If he turn away from his righteousness;” not his self-righteousness, the gloss of theologians: for God never speaks of turning away from that, for, in his eyes, that is a nonentity. There is no righteousness or holiness but what himself infuses into the soul of man, and as to self-righteousness, i.e., a man’s supposing himself to be righteous when he has not the life of God in his soul, it is the delusion of a dark and hardened heart; therefore it is the real righteous principle and righteous practice that God speaks of here. And he tells us, that al man may so “turn away from this,” and so “commit iniquity,” and “act as the wicked man,” that his righteousness shall be no more mentioned to his account, than the sins of the penitent backslider should be mentioned to his condemnation; and “in the sin that he” this once righteous man, “hath sinned, and in the trespass that he hath trespassed, in them shall he die.” O, how awful a termination of a life once distinguished for righteousness and true holiness! So then, God himself informs us that a righteous man may not only fall foully, but fall finally. But to such righteous persons the devil will ever preach, “Ye shall not surely die; ye shall be as God.” Touch, taste, and handle; ye cannot ultimately fall. Thus we find, by the manner of treating these two cases, that God’s way is equal, verse 25; just, merciful, and impartial. And to prove this, he sums up his conduct in the above cases, in the following verses, 26-29. And then, that the “wicked may not die in his sins,” and that the “backslider may return and find mercy,” he thus exhorts:—

Though God forgives the sins of those who turn to righteousness, He does not excuse the sins of someone who has been walking in righteousness and then turns to wickedness. Will such a person live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. God was not saying that a saved Israelite would lose his salvation if he fell into sin. Both the blessing and the judgment in view here are temporal, not eternal. The judgment was physical death (cf. vv. 4, 20, 26), not eternal damnation. An Israelite who had followed God’s Law but who later turned to idolatry or immorality could not expect his past righteousness to negate his present sins. God does not balance an individual’s good deeds against his bad deeds to determine his fate. An individual’s relationship with God when the judgment arrives determines whether he will live or die.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:24). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Even the righteous person who gives himself over to wickedness faces punishment according to his deeds. However, this punishment is temporal rather than eternal.<sup>58</sup>

**Chuck Smith 24-32:** So God's cry unto Israel. "Look, turn from your transgressions. Turn to Me and live. I don't have any pleasure in the death of the wicked. Turn and live." God's pleading with them. You say, "But what does that mean if the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity and dies in his iniquity his righteousness will not be remembered?" Well, that's for you to figure out. I think it means what it says.

**Constable:** A turn in the other direction would have the same result. If a person turned from righteous conduct and pursued a life of sin, God would punish him with premature death for his sins even though he had formerly done right.

An individual's relationship with God when the judgment arrives determines whether he will live or die.

A generation is not predetermined for judgment or for blessing by the previous one. Even within a generation, or within an individual life, the past does not necessarily determine the present or the future.

Ezekiel has hereby repudiated the notion of a 'treasury of merit or demerit' on two counts. First, one generation cannot build up such a treasure [*sic*] for another; each individual determines his or her own destiny by his or her own conduct. Second, an individual cannot build up such a treasury in one phase of his or her life and count on this to balance off a deficit later.

### **Ezekiel 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?**

**[Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal]** (Dake) Israel complained that the way of the Lord was not equal and just, for how could a righteous man who had lived in righteousness many years become a sinner again and die because of sin? Why should he not continue to live if he had lived more in righteousness than in sin? Why would he not be rewarded for his many righteous deeds? Why should he die for committing only one sin? God took issue with this kind of reasoning and plainly revealed the fact that sin is sin wherever it is found and in whomsoever it is found. It is a deadly thing that will damn the soul. One sin is sufficient to kill; he who sins incurs the death penalty regardless of all else in his life; and one sin will damn a righteous man as quickly as a wicked man. Every soul that sins will die; but no one needs to die through sin, for all are privileged to be made alive again upon meeting certain conditions of getting rid of sin. The sole responsibility of death or life is with the individual, not with God; He only blesses or curses all alike upon meeting the conditions of life or death. Here God maintained His ways are equal because He deals with all alike, without respect of persons. The ways of man are unequal because of expecting justice when injustice has

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<sup>58</sup> Believer' Study Bible

been done, expecting righteousness when sin has been committed, and expecting life when one kills himself by sin.

A typical childish response to punishment is to say, “That isn’t fair!” In reality, God is fair, but *we* have broken the rules. It is not God who must live up to our ideas of fairness; instead, we must live up to his. Don’t spend your time looking for the loopholes in God’s law. Instead, live up to God’s standards.

**25-32** Israel had charged God with unrighteousness, but God now turned the tables. Is My way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? (cf. v. 29; Job 40:8)

Ezekiel reminded Israel of the responsibility for sin borne by each member of the nation. I will judge you, each one according to his ways. If Israel fell, it would be for the sins of her own generation. Because of this, the nation needed to repent if she hoped to escape. Israel needed spiritual renewal. The people needed to get rid ... of their offenses and get a new heart and a new spirit (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26). The life or death of the people depended on their individual responses to God. Those who continued to rebel would die; those who repented and turned from sin would live.<sup>59</sup>

**ESV 25–29 The way of the Lord is not just.** The second objection, repeated in vv. 25 and 29, appears to be oriented to the immediately preceding teaching on repentance, rather than being a second objection to the main teaching of the chapter. “Just” (Hb. root *takan*, vv. 25, 29) has the sense of “weighed” or “measured,” that is, in conformity to a standard (cf. 1 Sam. 2:3). The irony of this objection is rich, coming from people whose lives have not accorded with justice.<sup>60</sup>

**Creation, Evil**—Faced with Ezekiel’s outline of moral responsibility, the people in captivity claimed the Lord was unjust. The prophet, however, insisted that those who committed the evil must accept the blame. God made a beautiful world and established it in righteousness. Sin entered because people made deliberate choices to do wrong things. Every generation must face moral responsibility for its actions. God’s moral law is both sensible and fair.

**Constable:** In spite of God's righteous dealings with people on the basis of their conduct, the Israelites were accusing Him of not doing right. The Lord asked if it was their ways rather than His that were not right.

### **Ezekiel 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.**

**[dieth in them]** Again it is plainly stated that if a righteous man turns to sin he dies the same as others. There is no exception; God is no respecter of persons.

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<sup>59</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:25–32). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>60</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1524). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

**[for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die]** (Dake) "For his iniquity" he dies, and not for any other reason. If Adam had not sinned he would not have died, and so it is with all other men (Ezekiel 18:4,20). Death passes upon all men, for all have sinned (Romans 5:12-21). Death is the penalty for sin; and because God is just every sinner must pay the penalty (Ezekiel 18:4,20; Genesis 2:17; Romans 1:29-32; Romans 6:14-23; Romans 8:12-13; Galatians 5:19-21).

**Constable 26-28:** The Lord repeated for clarification that turning to sin results in death but turning from sin (obeying God's covenant stipulations) results in life (cf. vv. 21-22, 24; Rom. 6:23). Clearly He meant that a final turning is in view rather than a superficial or temporary turning. If a person abandons God to pursue a life without God (i.e., apostasy), or vice versa, the result will be death or life respectively.

The reference is not to a temporary lapse, but to a persistent choice of evil which changes the course of a man's life.

### **Ezekiel 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.**

**[when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right]** (Dake) Just as surely and as often as a righteous man commits sin he incurs the death penalty; and when the wicked man ceases to sin and does righteousness he is rewarded with life. There is no exception. It is like breaking civil laws—when one is guilty of breaking the law the penalty has to be paid (Ezekiel 18:21-32). The only way of escape is through genuine repentance and turning from sin.

**[he shall save his soul alive]** The wicked man saves his soul when he does that which is lawful and right, which is the same as obeying the gospel (Ezekiel 18:27-28). The righteous man loses his soul when he sins, which is also according to the gospel (Romans 1:29-32; Romans 6:14-23; Romans 8:13-14; Galatians 5:19-21).

### **Ezekiel 18:28**

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

**[die]** To say that the death referred to in this chapter is physical death is completely unscriptural. (Dake)

Seven Proofs This Death Not Physical:

1. Physical death was not the penalty for sin, but a result of it. See Penalty for Sin under Where Are the Dead?.

2. It is stated here that only the soul that sins dies (Ezekiel 18:4,20); therefore, since the righteous die physically as well as sinners, physical death could not be the penalty referred to.
3. All men have physical life regardless of sin committed or righteousness done; so physical death could not be the reference in this chapter (Ezekiel 18:15-18).
4. The fact that a wicked man can turn from sin and death to live by righteousness proves that physical death is not the penalty for sin. One is just as much alive physically before he turns from sin as when he ceases to sin and receives life (Ezekiel 18:21-32).
5. Righteous men do not die physically if they turn from righteousness to commit sin; they continue to live physically (Ezekiel 18:24-28).
6. If physical death were the penalty for sin, then every wicked man upon dying physically would pay his penalty and therefore be saved as much as the righteous man. God could not condemn him further or send him to hell, for the penalty would thus be paid; but it is declared here that the only way to live is by turning from sin to righteousness, not by dying a physical death (Ezekiel 18:5,9,21-32).
7. If physical death were the penalty for sin, then one would need to repent, turn from sin, cast away sins, and get a new heart and spirit in order to live physically (Ezekiel 18:20-32).

### **Ezekiel 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?**

Nevertheless the Israelites were claiming that God's ways were not right. It was really their ways that were not right (cf. v. 25).

### **The appeal 18:30-32**

### **Ezekiel 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.**

**[Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin]** (Dake) The conditions of salvation given here are the the same as in the N.T. (Ezekiel 18:30-32 with Matthew 1:15; Matthew 16:15; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 26:18; Romans 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 1:7-9).

**Clarke: Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions**—There is still life; still a God that has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. one who is ever ready to give his Holy Spirit to all them that ask him; therefore “repent and turn, so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”

**LAN 30-32:** Ezekiel's solution to the problem of inherited guilt is for each person to have a changed life. This is God's work in us and not something we can do for ourselves. The Holy Spirit does it (Psalm 51:10-12). If we renounce our life's direction of sin and rebellion and turn to God, he will give us a new direction, a new love, and a new power to change. You can begin by faith, trusting in God's power to change your heart and mind. Then determine to live each day with him in control (Ephes. 4:22-24).

**ESV 30–32 Conclusion Repent:** Repentance is not being urged on Jerusalem, for the preceding chapters affirm that its destruction is assured. Rather, the exiles are pressed to repent and take responsibility for their moral lives. Thus the appeal is to make yourselves a new heart and spirit, in contrast to 11:19 and 36:26, where these are the gift of God. The restatement of God's displeasure in anyone's death (18:32; cf. v. 23 and note on 33:11) is the basis for the final entreaty to turn, and live.<sup>61</sup>

The problem is not God's unwillingness to save man, but rather man's refusal to be saved. This is a masterful call to repentance. It is not divine grace or human freedom, but God's mercy and man's choice. This is a call to those who have pushed God aside to awaken and renew themselves in faith in God.

**Constable:** In closing, God promised to judge each Israelite according to his or her own conduct. He urged His people to turn from their transgressions of His law so their sins would not prove to be what tripped them up as they journeyed through life.

### **Ezekiel 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?**

**Cast away**—With a holy violence, dash away every transgression and incentive to it.

**Clarke: Make you a new heart**—Call upon God for it, and he will give it: for as sure as you earnestly call on God through Christ to save you, so surely you shall be saved; and the effect will so speedily follow, that God is pleased to attribute that in some sort to yourselves, which is done by his grace alone; because ye earnestly call upon him for it, come in the right way to receive it, and are determined never to rest till you have it.

**Clarke: For why will ye die**—Who should you go to hell while the kingdom of God is open to receive you? Why should you be the devil's slaves, when ye may be Christ's freemen! **WHY WILL YE DIE?** Every word is emphatic.

Why—show God or man one reason. Will—obstinacy alone,—a determination not to be saved, or a voluntary listlessness about salvation,—can prevent you. Ye—children of so many mercies, fed and supported by a kind God all your life; ye, who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ; ye, who have made many promises to give up yourselves to God; ye, who have been dedicated to the ever-blessed Trinity, and promised to renounce

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<sup>61</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1524). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; why will YE die? Die!—what is this? A separation from God and the glory of his power for ever! Die!—forfeiting all the purposes for which your immortal souls were made! Die—to know what the worm is that never dieth, and what that fire is which is never quenched! Why will ye die?

**McGee:** The teaching of this chapter answers the new psychology we have today. Psychology argues that the reason a person is a brat or an oddball is because his mother didn't treat him right but neglected him and didn't love him. My friend, you stand alone. You are a sinner because you are a sinner yourself. There's an old bromide that is rather crude, but it certainly expresses it well: Every tub must sit on its own bottom. Every individual will stand before God, and he won't be able to blame his papa and mama at that time. Ezekiel makes it very clear that the Israelite will be judged in this life on the basis of the life he lived, whether he was a believer or not.<sup>62</sup>

**Constable:** 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 (cf. Rom. 13:14).

### **Ezekiel 18:32**

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

**Missler:** The theological issue of faith versus works is well discussed in the Old Testament and obviously well amplified in the New. That really is not the emphasis here. The emphasis here was getting them focused on their own accountability and not to hide behind some implied injustice because they were going to be sent to captivity because their fathers sinned. Through Ezekiel the Lord was saying, "Nonsense. You are getting judged for your own sin; but if you turn from that sin, you will live."

**[of him that dieth]** Of him that dies, righteous or wicked.

**For I have no pleasure**—God repeats what he had so solemnly declared before. Can ye doubt his sincerity? his ability? his willingness? the efficacy of the blood of his covenant?

**Clarke: Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye**—Reader, now give God thy heart. Though every man comes into the world with a fallen nature—a soul infected with sin, yet no man is damned on that account. He who refuses that grace which pardons sin and heals infected nature, who permits the evil principle to break out into transgression, and continues and dies in his iniquity and sin, and will not come unto Christ that he may have life; he, and he only, goes to perdition. Nor will the righteousness of a parent or relation help his sinful soul: no man can have more grace than is necessary to save himself; and none can have that, who does not receive it through Christ Jesus. It is the mercy of God in

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<sup>62</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Christ which renders the salvation of a sinner possible; and it is that mercy alone which can heal the backslider. The atoning blood blots out all that is past; the same blood cleanses from all unrighteousness. Who believes so as to apply for this redemption? Who properly thanks God for having provided such a Savior?

**McGee:** Again, this refers to physical death. God does not take any delight today in seeing anyone die. That is something that is foreign to Him; He didn't intend death for mankind. Remember that the Lord Jesus *wept* at the tomb of Lazarus, even though He was going to bring him back into this life. By man came death, not through the working of God, but because of man's sin.<sup>63</sup>

**Constable:** This death among His people gave the Lord no pleasure (cf. 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).<sup>291</sup> The Lord normally gave Old Testament saints the hope that their reward would come before they died (but see 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 them for their works.

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).

Few units in Ezekiel match ch. 18 for the transparency and permanent relevance of their message.

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<sup>63</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 18:32). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.