

# Ezekiel 18 - A False Proverb Refuted; Refutation of Generational Sin; Individual Responsibility

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### (2) Prophecies of coming judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (Ezek 4:1—24:27)

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###### (i) The proverb stated (18:1-2)

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## The Justified Verdict

In Ezek 15-17, Ezekiel had delivered three parables to convict the people of Judah of their sins. In Ezek 18, he returns to a more direct message to highlight the nation's guilt. The message in Ezek 18 is similar to that in Ezek 12:21-28, for they both answered the people's proverbs in their attempt to deny their coming judgment.

## 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 (Ex 34:6-7), 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 being 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 Ezek 3; 14. It is also dealt with in the Torah (Deut 24) and in 2 Kings 14.

It would be unjust for God to punish children for the sins of their parents. Yet this is exactly what some people were saying in Ezekiel's day, as expressed in their proverb, "The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge" (v2). They were saying that in allowing the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem, God was punishing the people for the sins of their ancestors. God responded by saying that they should not use that proverb any more (v3). Then He announced, "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (v20). It is also evident from Deut 24:16 that God does not hold children responsible for the sinful actions of their parents.

## Ezekiel 18

(i) Ninth false security: a proverb (18:1-32)

(i) The proverb stated (18:1-2)

1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

1 This message came to me from the LORD:

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

- God spoke to Ezekiel again, this time to counter a particular attitude that was prevalent among the Israelites in exile

2 "What do you *people* mean by using this proverb about the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat sour grapes, But *it is* the children's teeth *that* have become blunt'?

2 "What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'?

2 "Why do you cite this proverb when you talk about Israel's land: 'The fathers eat sour grapes but it's their children's teeth that have become numb.'

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?

- God asks what the Israelites in exile what they meant by this proverb...

- The point of the proverb was that the actions of the ancestors determine the fate of their descendants

- It implied that the Babylonian Captivity was the consequence for the sins committed by previous generations rather than those of Ezekiel's contemporaries
- The whole notion of "generational sin" that these exiles had in their minds came from a misinterpretation of Ex 20:5 and Num 14:18, where God is described as visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, even to the third and fourth generation.
- The exiles began to apply this principle incorrectly to justify their deportation, shifting blame away from their own actions and onto their ancestors. In doing this, they refused to acknowledge any responsibility for their situation, and by asserting their innocence and employing this proverb, they indirectly accused God of injustice.
- The correct interpretation of the principle in the Mosaic Law (Ex 20:5; Num 14:18) is that the descendants endured consequences not merely due to their ancestors' actions but because they persisted in the same wrongdoing
- The principle of "generational sin" only pertains if the subsequent generations indulge in the same sins as their fathers. If they did, they would receive the same punishment/consequence.
- The punishment was not a result of the ancestral transgressions but of the ongoing behavior of the descendants

### **The False Idea of Generational Sin**

The children of Israel had a proverb they used; it is mentioned twice by Jeremiah:

Jer 31:29: In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

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

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.

The people may have 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" (Ex 20:5; Cf. Ex 34:6-7; Deut 5:9). The problem is that the proverb they drew from this verse is incorrect.

- This is the danger in lifting out a 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.

### **Dodging Blame - Generational Sin**

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. Just as the modern Jews attribute their present dispersion, not to their own sins, but to those of their forefathers. Compare Gen 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."

### **Despair and Fatalism**

If they were being punished for the crimes of Manasseh (2 Kings 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 Is 22:12-13) Is there any alternative to bleak despair for man? (Ezek 33:10).

(ii) Principle of individual responsibility defended (18:3-18)

(a) God rebukes the proverb (18:3-4)

3 **As I live,**" declares the Lord GOD, "you certainly are not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

3 As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

3 As long as I live," declares the LORD, "you won't use this proverb about Israel anymore.

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

- "As I live" - God put Himself under oath stating that this misapplication of this quote from Ex 20:5; Num 14:18 would cease from among the Israelite exiles in Babylon

4 Behold, all **souls** are Mine; **the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.**

4 Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

4 Look! Every living soul belongs to me—the father's as well as the son's.<sup>1</sup> So pay attention! The person who keeps on sinning is going to die."

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.

- God now emphasizes individual responsibility

- "...soul" [4x] - nephesh, a reference to physical life (Cf. Gen 2:7)

— God asserted His sovereignty over all physical life, and indicates that the punishment would also be related to physical (temporal) life

— The principle expressed in this verse transcends Ezekiel's time: Since God is the Owner of all life, everyone stands in the same relationship with Him. No one can excuse their relationship with God based on the sins of their ancestors.

- "...the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine" - both the father and the son stand in the same relationship with God. The son does not have a proxy relationship (through his father) with God, he has a direct relationship with God. Likewise, the father also has a direct relationship with God.

- "...The soul who sins will die" - this statement underscores the idea of individual responsibility. Its reference to physical death correlates with the Law of Moses (Cf. Lev 26:14-39; Deut 28:58-59; 30:15-20).

In the notion of generational sin, it must be noted that while subsequent generations may bear the consequences of their forefathers' sins, it is essential to clarify that God does not punish the righteous for the sins of the wicked. However, the repercussions of judgment on the guilty can affect the righteous. For example, Ezekiel and Daniel were not guilty of idolatry. Yet, as a result of the judgment for that sin, these two members of the remnant were also taken into captivity.

#### (b) God refutes the proverb (18:5-18)

Ezekiel now presents three hypothetical cases (v5-18) that prove the principle of individual responsibility.

##### (1) Righteous man blessed (18:5-9)

5 "But if a man is **righteous and practices justice** and righteousness,

5 "But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness,

5 "If a person is righteous, and practices what's lawful and right,

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

- The first hypothetical case (v5-9) describes a righteous ancestor and the fact that this person is promised life. Since the following cases refer to a son and his descendant, the righteous person could be described as a grandfather.

- "...righteous and practices justice" - understood as conformity to the Mosaic Law; this man lived in accordance with the standard required by the Law.

6 *if* he does not **eat at the mountain shrines** or **raise his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel**, or **defile his neighbor's wife** or **approach a woman during her menstrual period**—

6 and does not eat at the mountain *shrines* or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period—

6 if he doesn't eat at mountain shrines, and doesn't look to the idols that have been erected in Israel's house, if he doesn't defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her time of menstrual separation,

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,

- "...eat at the mountain *shrines*" - a phrase that depicts idol worship, which typically also involved sexual immorality (prohibited in Deut 12:2)

- "...raise his eyes" - implies adoration or reverence

- "...idols of the house of Israel" - worship of the golden calf

— After Israel was divided and Jeroboam began to govern the northern part, he stopped all pilgrimages to Jerusalem and erected two golden calves, one in Bethel and the other in Dan (1 Kings 12:28-30). Thus, these two cities replaced Jerusalem as worship centers (Cf. 2 Chr 6:6).

— Then the king built shrines on high places and appointed priests, disregarding the Levitical lineage (1 Kings 12:31). This resulted in a total deviation from God's prescribed worship system, substituting it with a man-made religion that revolved around the worship of golden calves. Righteous Israelites did not "lift up their eyes" to these idols.

- "...defile his neighbor's wife" - he did not commit adultery, which would have violated Ex 20:14; Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22

- "...approach a woman during her menstrual period" - he would not have sex with his wife during her period; this act would have violated Lev 15:24; 18:19; 20:18.

7 and if a man **does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,**

7 if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, *but* gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

7 if he doesn't oppress anyone, but instead returns the debtor's security for his debt, if he doesn't rob anyone, but instead shares his food with the hungry and gives clothes to those who are naked,

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;

- "...does not oppress *anyone*" - refrained from wronging or oppressing others (Cf. Lev 25:14)

- "...restores to the debtor his pledge" - if someone took another's coat as a pledge in the morning, they must return it by sundown. The reason for this was that the poor would sleep

on their coats and use them as cover for warmth.

— This is related to the commandments of Ex 22:26-27; Deut 24:6,10-13; However, Amos 2:8 shows that this commandment regarding a debtor was frequently ignored by Israel.

- "...does not commit robbery" - such action would have violated Ex 20:15; Lev 19:13

- "...gives his bread to the hungry" - this care and compassion for others correlates with Deut 15:11

- "...covers the naked with clothing" - this would be in obedience to Lev 25:35

8 *and if he **does not lend money at interest or take interest, if he keeps his hand from injustice and executes true justice between one person and another,***

8 if he does not lend *money* on interest or take increase, *if he keeps his hand from iniquity and executes true justice between man and man,*

8 if he doesn't lend with usury or exact interest, but instead refuses to participate in what is unjust, if he administers true justice between people,

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,

- "...does not lend *money* at interest or take interest" - the tenth characteristic involves refraining from charging interest on loans to other Jews. The Mosaic Law allowed Israelites to charge interest on loans to Gentiles, charging interest on loans to other Jews violated Ex 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20.

- "...keeps his hand from injustice" - means a man had not made a profit on lending money apart from interest

- "...executes true justice between one person and another" - a man who ensures fairness and honesty in business dealings, including accurate weights and measures (Cf. Lev 19:15-16,35-36; Deut 25:13-16)

9 *if he **walks in My statutes and keeps My ordinances so as to deal faithfully**—he is righteous and will **certainly live,***" declares the Lord GOD.

9 *if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous and will surely live,"* declares the Lord GOD.

9 if he lives his life consistent with my statutes and keeps my ordinances by practicing what's true, then he's righteous and will certainly live," declares the Lord GOD.

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.

- "...walks in My statutes and keeps My ordinances so as to deal faithfully" - the fourteenth and final characteristic of a righteous man. This last characteristic encompasses all previous characteristics, emphasizing that a righteous person is one who has adhered to all of the righteousness prescribed in the Mosaic Law (Cf. Lev 18:1-5; Deut 26:16-19)

- "...certainly live" - the just reward of a righteous man (Cf. Deut 30:15-20)
- This promise of longevity (a long life) was unique to the Mosaic Law and does not apply to believers today.

## (2) Sinning son cursed (18:10-13)

**10** "However, **he** may father a violent son who sheds blood, and does any one of these things to a brother

**10** "Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother

10 "Now suppose that person produces a son who's violent, a murderer, and practices any of these things,

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,

- The second hypothetical case (v10-13) concerns the unrighteous son of the righteous man described in v5-9. The point is that the righteousness of the father (v5-9) does not protect the son.

- "...he" - the righteous man in v5-9

11 (though he himself did not do any of **these things**), that is, he even eats at the mountain *shrines*, and defiles his neighbor's wife,

11 (though he himself did not do any of these things), that is, he even eats at the mountain *shrines*, and defiles his neighbor's wife,

11 even though the father hasn't done any of these things. The son who eats at mountain shrines, defiles his neighbor's wife,

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

- "...these things" - the deed listed in v10b-13a, which are the exact opposite things his righteous father did in v5-9

12 oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but raises his eyes to the idols *and* commits abomination,

12 oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but lifts up his eyes to the idols *and* commits abomination,

12 oppresses the afflicted and the poor, robs others, doesn't return security for a debt, looks to idols, does detestable things,

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,



13 lends *money* at interest and takes interest; **will he live?** He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he shall certainly be put to death; his blood will be on himself.

13 he lends *money* on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.

13 loans with usury, and exacts interest; will he live? He certainly will not! He has done all these detestable practices. He will certainly die, and his guilt will be his own fault."

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.

- "...will he live?" - the consequences, formulated as a rhetorical question. The emphatic answer is, No!

— The biblical principle is that a righteous man's unrighteous offspring are destined for judgment. This principle emphasizes individual responsibility. The reason for the son's judgment is that he has done all these abominations. His sentence is that he shall surely die.

— His blood shall be upon him, and only upon him, in keeping with the Law of Moses

— The specific commandments whose violation warrants the death penalty are adultery (Lev 20:10), murder (Num 35:16), idolatry (Deut 17:2-5)

### (3) Righteous grandson blessed (18:14-18)

**14** "Now behold, **he** has fathered **a son** who saw all his father's sins which he committed, but **he** has seen *them* and does not do likewise.

**14** "Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father's sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise.

14 "Now suppose that he produced a son who practiced all of his father's sins, but then that son began to fear me and stopped doing all of these things.

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,

- "...he" [2x] - the unrighteous son in v10-13

- "...a son" - the grandson of the righteous man in v5-9

- The scenario is that the unrighteous son (v10-13) fathers a child who does not follow in his footsteps, meaning he saw the unrighteous acts of his father and does not do likewise

15 He does not eat at the mountain *shrines* or raise his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel; he has not defiled his neighbor's wife,

15 He does not eat at the mountain *shrines* or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor's wife,

15 That is, suppose he doesn't eat at the mountain shrines, doesn't look to the idols of Israel's house, doesn't defile his neighbor's wife,

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,

16 nor oppressed anyone, nor retained a pledge, nor committed robbery; *instead*, he gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

16 or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery, *but* he gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

16 doesn't oppress anyone, doesn't take possession of a debtor's pledge, or doesn't steal, but instead shares his food with the hungry, gives clothes to those who are naked,

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,

17 he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take *any kind of* interest on loans, *but* executes My ordinances, *and* walks in My statutes; **he will not die for his father's guilt**, he will certainly live.

17 he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take interest or increase, *but* executes My ordinances, and walks in My statutes; he will not die for his father's iniquity, he will surely live.

17 doesn't refuse to help the afflicted, or refuses to loan with usury or exact interest, but instead follows my ordinances and lives his life consistent with my statutes. He won't die because of his father's sin, will he? No! He'll certainly live.

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 will not die for his father's guilt" - the result of the grandson's righteousness is that he does not have to suffer death because of his father's sins

18 As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed *his* brother, and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his guilt.

18 As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed *his* brother and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity.

18 As for his father, watch out! If he wrongfully oppressed or robbed his brother and did what wasn't good among his people, he'll die because of his own sin."

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.

- This verse provides a final assessment of the unrighteous father, summarizing his sinful state

To summarize, v1-18 deals with the concept of individual responsibility. Verses 1-4 address a proverb with which the people of Judah sought to absolve themselves of the guilt of their exile by attributing it solely to the sins of their ancestors. Implicitly, they were questioning God's justice. Verses 5-18 therefore present three scenarios in which the actions of the individual people determine their fate. In this way, the text repeatedly emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility. Although the Babylonian Captivity was put in motion by the reprehensible actions of Manasseh, the captives could not solely point to Judah's past. They themselves were just as guilty as their ancestors.

### (c) Conclusion (18:19-20)

#### **The Objections of the People**

Verses 19-29 introduce two objections (v19-24; v25-29) by the people (exiles) who heard Ezekiel's teaching on individual responsibility. The people challenge the notion that a son should not share in the father's guilt. The people get this incorrect belief are based on their misinterpretation of Ex 20:4-6.

**19** "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not suffer *the punishment* for the father's guilt?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness *and* has kept all My statutes and done them, he shall certainly live.

**19** "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.

**19** "Yet you keep asking, 'Why wouldn't the son bear the punishment of his father's sin?' Because the son has done what was lawful and right, and has kept all my statutes and obeyed them, he's certainly going to live.

**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.

- The people's first objection is...why isn't the son held accountable for the father's sin? This objection stems from their misinterpretation of Ex 20:4-6 (Cf. Ex 34:7; Num 14:18), where God clearly stated that He would punish the descendants for the sins of their ancestors up to the third and fourth generations.

— This principle of the Mosaic Law was true only because those descendants continued in the same sinful behavior as their forefathers. The core message of Ex 20 is not to declare

the innocence of the children, but rather to emphasize the on-going cycle of sin across multiple generations.

- The second part of this verse is the divine answer to the objection: Yahweh reiterated that no son would be judged for the sins of his father. If the son did what was right and lawful in obeying God's statutes, then he would surely live.

— To those who lived both externally and inwardly in accordance with the Mosaic Law, God promised a long life regardless of the deeds of their ancestors.

20 The person who sins will die. A son will not suffer *the punishment* for the father's guilt, nor will a father suffer *the punishment* for the son's guilt; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

20 The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

20 The soul who sins dies. The son won't bear the punishment of his father's sin and the father won't bear the punishment of his son's sin. The righteous deeds of that righteous person will be attributed to him, while the wicked deeds of the wicked person will be charged against him.

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.

- In contrast, the soul that sins (disobeys the Mosaic Law) will die. So the righteous person was guaranteed longevity by God as a result of his righteousness, but the wicked person died because of his own sin.

#### (d) Application (18:21-32)

##### (1) To the wicked and righteous (18:21-29)

##### a. The wicked repenting brings life (18:21-23,27-29)

**21** "But if the wicked person turns from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall certainly live; he shall not die.

**21** "But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

**21** But if the wicked person turns from all his sins, which he did and keeps my statutes, then he'll live. He won't die.

**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.

- Now God outlines a principle: even those who persistently violated the Mosaic Law could escape judgment...if they willingly turned away from all his past sins and began to keep

God's statutes. This demonstrated repentance, a fundamental changing of one's mind from rebellion against the will of God to obedience to the will of God.

22 All his offenses which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

22 All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

22 None of the transgressions that he had committed will be held against him. Because of the righteous deeds that he had done, he'll live.

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.

- Repentance and turning from sin to obedience would mean that person would inherit the promise of longevity (long life) of Deut 30:16

23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he would turn from his ways and live?

23 Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?

23 "I don't take delight in the death of the wicked, do I?" asks the Lord GOD. "Shouldn't I rather delight when he turns from his wicked ways and lives?

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?

- The reason for the possibility of escaping judgment is explained...God does not look to judge, but rather desires the wicked to repent from his sinful ways and choose life (Cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

#### b. The righteous sinning brings death (18:24-26)

**24** "But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness, commits injustice *and* does according to all the abominations that the wicked person does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

**24** "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

**24** But when the righteous person abandons his righteous deeds and commits evil, detestable practices, as wicked people do, he won't live, will he? None of the righteous

acts that he had done will be remembered. He'll die in his treacherous unfaithfulness and sins that he had committed."

**24** But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

- The opposite is also true...if a righteous person turns to wickedness, will that person still be granted the longevity promised in the Mosaic Law? The rhetorical question demands a negative answer.

— In fact, none of his righteous deeds that he did before he turned to wickedness will even be remembered. One example is a husband who was faithful to his wife for their entire marriage, then one day commits adultery. That man's years of faithfulness will be forgotten, and he would be punished for his one act of sin (a capital offense).

— So even if a person performed a multitude of righteous deeds in accordance with the law throughout his entire life, he could not be saved from the consequences of transgressing a specific commandment punishable by the death penalty.

In summary, the response to the people's first objection, that Ex 20:4-6 justified them in blaming their ancestors for their captivity, is as follows: People shape their own fate through the choices that they make. While this principle holds true in the dispensation of grace, under the Mosaic Law, it specifically meant that if they repented of their sins, they were promised longevity. However, if they sinned after living a life of righteousness, this promise of longevity would become null and void. Offenders such as adulterers, murderers, and blasphemers would still be subject to execution.

### **Eternal Security**

Ezek 18:24 (and similar passages such as Ezek 3:17-21; 33:10-20) have been understood by some that a Christian may lose his righteous standing before God. But in support of the security of the believer, it should be observed that these passages in Ezekiel do not teach the eternal loss of a saved person because the word "righteous" may refer to ceremonial religion (Cf. Matt 5:20) and not the righteousness which is from God by faith (Cf. Phil 3:7-9).

Moreover, the punishment threatened refers only to physical death rather than to eternal death. In any case, these texts in Ezekiel must be considered in the light of such NT affirmations as John 10:28-29, Rom 5:8-9; 8:38-39; Phil 1:6; 1 Peter 1:4-5) that so clearly teach the security of the believer.

A historical illustration of the principle that repentance allows an escape from judgment is seen in King Manasseh. Although much of his reign was characterized by extreme wickedness (2 Chr 33:1-9), he repented toward the end of his life (2 Chr 33:10-20). He personally received forgiveness, even though his earlier wickedness had already set in motion events that eventually led to the downfall of Jerusalem. His repentance could not reverse the nation's trajectory as the people continued in his previous idolatry. The point of no return had been reached during Manasseh's reign, and from then on, the nation of Judah was under the decree of divine judgment.

### **Accusing God of Unrighteousness**

25 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord **is not right.**' Hear now, house of Israel! **Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?**

25 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?

25 "Yet you keep saying, 'The LORD isn't being consistent with his standards.' Pay attention, you house of Israel: Is my behavior really inconsistent with my standards? Isn't it your behavior that isn't just?

**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?

- The second objection by the people is based on what God said in v19-24, and challenges the fairness of God's justice

— It seemed unfair to the people who heard the arguments brought forth in the previous section that someone's many wicked deeds are forgotten after only one act of repentance, but for a person who performed righteous deeds for a lifetime, their good deeds are overlooked because of a single transgression.

- "...is not right" - lo' yittaken, "is not equal" or "is not fair"; it carries the notion of arbitrariness and a lack of principle (Cf. 33:17,20)

— Initially the people had argued that their own fate was dictated by their parents' behavior. But apparently the answers the people received to the first objection (v19-24) made matters worse. The people felt vulnerable to a God whose actions, to them, seemed unpredictable or perhaps even irrational.

- "...Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?" - the divine response is a repudiation of the people's accusation against God. It says that God is not the one practicing inequality but rather it was the people themselves. God was simply following the Law that He had given to Israel through Moses. It was the people's misinterpretation of the Law that led them to the wrong conclusions.

— God's actions were not arbitrary; it was the people's conduct that was unjust, and they stood condemned because they failed to adhere to the standards of justice mandated by

the Law. Their objections stemmed from their wrong interpretation of what the Law required.

26 When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness, commits injustice and dies because of it, for his injustice which he has committed he dies.

26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die.

26 "When a righteous person turns from his righteous deeds and does evil, he'll die because of that evil. He'll die because of his unrighteous acts that he committed.

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.

- In the previous example, if a man is righteous his entire life then commits one act of wickedness (iniquity, punishable as a capital offense), and faces death because of it, his former righteousness does not protect him from his punishment (death).

27 But when a wicked person turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, **he will save his life**.

27 Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.

27 When a wicked person quits his wicked behavior and does what's just and right, he'll be enabled to live.

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.

- Revisits the first example, where a wicked person repents, reiterating that this repentance leads to life

- "...he will save his life" - notice the active role of the wicked person in saving his life. This emphasizes individual responsibility.

28 Since **he understood** and turned away from all his offenses which he had committed, he shall certainly live; he shall not die.

28 Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

28 Because he reconsidered his transgression and turned away from everything that he had been doing, he'll certainly live and not die.

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

- "...he understood" - the reason for the positive outcome of the man's repentance



29 But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?

29 But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?

29 Yet Israel's house keeps saying, 'The LORD isn't being consistent with his standards.' Is it my behavior that's inconsistent with my standards? Is it not your behavior that's inconsistent with my standards?"

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?

- God emphasized Israel's responsibility in this whole matter. They misinterpreted God's law, and from that raised objections to His methods, when His ways were equal and consistent with His own laws. The ways of the people, however, were not.

(2) To the present generation (18:30-32)

**30** "Therefore I will judge you, house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your offenses, so that wrongdoing does not become a stumbling block to you.

**30** "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.

**30** "Therefore, Israel, I'm going to judge you according to the behavior of each and every one of you," declares the Lord GOD. "So repent and turn from all your sins so that sin won't keep on being a stumbling block for you.

**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.

- God judges sin, period. Therefore, because of all that He said in v1-29, God intended to judge the house of Israel, both nationally and individually. The basis of His judgment would be the people's ways, not the ways (sins) of their ancestors, but their own behavior and disobedience.

- In the second half of the verse, God calls on His people to repent and forsake their transgressions

— If the people persisted in their current path, their sins would inevitably become a stumbling block and lead to their downfall. Yet if they repented, they could enjoy the longevity promised in Deut 30:16, even while in captivity.

**31** Hurl away from you all your offenses which you have committed and make yourselves a **new heart** and a new spirit! For why should you die, house of Israel?

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?

31 Stop your transgressing—the deeds by which you’ve rebelled—and then make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, you house of Israel?

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?

- This verse explains what repentance involves. Cast away their transgressions instead of continuing in them.

- "...new heart" - symbolizes faith

- "...new spirit" - symbolizes regeneration

- Thus, repentance entails more than just confessing sin. It requires a definite "change of mind" and a subsequent turning away from those sins that are being confessed.

- The exiles should adhere to this exhortation because it would prevent early death

32 For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD.

"Therefore, repent and live!"

32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD.

"Therefore, repent and live."

32 I don't take pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the LORD. "So repent, so you may live!"

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

- The last verse of this chapter reaffirms God's desire: God takes no pleasure in the deaths of His people. If anyone faced premature death, it was because of specific violations of the Mosaic Law.