

# How To Escape Being Punished By God For Your Sins!

Our last study was from Ezekiel 18:1-20. This study is from the same chapter, verses 21-32. In the previous study, we discovered a proverb in verse 2 which said,

**The fathers eat the sour grapes,  
But the children's teeth are set on edge.  
Ezekiel 18:2 (NASB)**

It means that the sour grapes the fathers ate would affect the children's teeth. "Set on edge" referred to damage done to the teeth. This proverb was so common that even the prophet Jeremiah referred to it (Jeremiah 31:29). The proverb means that the children were destined to commit the same sins that were committed by their great grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers. They could not escape committing the same sins and experiencing the consequences. That is how they interpreted Exodus 20:5 which says,

**You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me. Exodus 20:5 (NASB)**



The principle that Yahweh gave us in this verse is that the sins of the fathers would be visited on their great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren if they hated Yahweh. This verse reveals the children would suffer the consequences of their father's sins while they were in the home. But as adults, they can escape if they do not hate Yahweh. But if they do hate Yahweh, then the principle applies only until the third or fourth generation. This divine principle is also repeated in Numbers 14:18 and Deuteronomy 5:9. It is repeated to make sure we do not miss the message. This principle should have motivated the Israelites to live a righteous life in order to protect themselves and their own children, but most of them did not do that.

Sadly, the Israelites believed they would experience the consequences of their forefathers' sins. They thought that they did not have any choice but to suffer the effects of their forefathers' sins. They believed they were victims of their forefathers. They could have said their great-grandfather or grandfather made them do it. That is the message of the proverb.

**PRINCIPLE #1 — EZEKIEL 18:1-20.** Therefore, Yahweh gave a message to the prophet Ezekiel that explained they were not victims of the sins of their forefathers. In order to communicate this, Yahweh gave them three examples that should have

corrected their misunderstanding. In verses 5-9, Yahweh explained that if a man practices righteousness and justice, he will be regarded as righteous and will surely live.

In verses 10-13, Yahweh said that even though a righteous man had a wicked son, the wicked son would still die. Why? Because of all the sins that he had committed. In verse 13, Yahweh said, "His blood will be on his own head."

In verses 14-18, Yahweh described a wicked man who had a righteous son. In verse 17, Yahweh said the righteous son "will not die for his father's iniquity, but will surely live." But his father will die for his own iniquity. It is important to notice a righteous son breaks free from the curse in Exodus 20:5. Why? Because he does not hate Yahweh, but instead he loves Yahweh. We must remember that Jesus said,

**The one who is not with Me is against Me; and the one who does not gather with Me scatters. Matthew 12:30 (NASB)**

Then in verses 19-20, the Israelites complained,

**"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. 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. Ezekiel 18:19-20 (NASB)**

That is, a righteous son is responsible for his own sin. He is not a victim of his great-grandfather and grandfather. Also, every father is responsible for his own sins. This helps us understand that the message of Exodus 20:5 is that the sins of the fathers would affect the great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren if they are wicked individuals.

Therefore in Jeremiah 31:30, the prophet Jeremiah corrected the proverb and reworded it like this,

**But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. Jeremiah 31:30 (NASB)**

So, if a counselor or psychologist blames our parents for our own sinful behavior, they are wrong. Yes, their behavior can influence us to be righteous or wicked, but we are not automatically destined to be like our parents. In fact, many children are rebellious and want to be different. The message of this part of Ezekiel 18 is that those who love Yahweh will pursue righteousness and escape the influence of their forefathers.

Yes, we inherited our sin nature from Adam according to Romans 5:12.

**Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12 (NASB)**

So, every child is born a sinner and we prove it by sinning. We can only blame Adam for our sin nature. But we cannot blame anyone else for the sins we commit. James 1:13-15 teaches that when we sin, it reflects our own internal desire to sin. We either choose to sin or not to sin. Therefore, a wicked person cannot blame their forefathers because he or she chose to be a wicked person. Then the principle will apply to them. If they will choose to be a righteous person, they will escape the consequences. So, this gave us the principle from our last study that we are responsible for our own sins and not our forefathers.

**THREE PRINCIPLES IN EZEKIEL 18:21-29.** That brings us to our study in verses 21-32. In these verses Yahweh gives us three more principles. Yahweh does it in an interesting way. Here are verses 21-22.

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**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. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. Ezekiel 18:21-22 (NASB)**

This illustration is about a wicked man who turns away from his sins. The Hebrew verb, sub, which is translated as "turns" is in the imperfect tense, which means he is repeatedly

turning away. He did not turn away one time. Instead, he repeatedly turned away. The Hebrew word for “has committed” is *asa*. It is in the perfect tense which indicates a pattern of life. That is, the man turned from a pattern of wicked behavior and began to practice justice and righteousness. So, Yahweh said that this man “will surely live and not die.” Why? Because he decided to be a righteous man.

Then verse 22 gives us some wonderful news. Consequently, all of his transgressions will not be remembered. The idea is that he was guilty because of his wickedness. But now he is not guilty since Yahweh has forgotten his past sins. Notice that Yahweh forgave all of his past sins. Yahweh will forgive all his sins, not just some of them.

At the end of verse 22, Yahweh explained why his sins will not be remembered. He said, “because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.” This gives us a second principle. Yahweh wants the wicked to pursue righteousness so they can live physically and have eternal life.

Now, it is important for us to notice that Yahweh has been referring to external behavior as an indication of a man or woman’s internal spiritual condition. Jesus gave us the reason in Matthew 15:18-19,

**“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.” Matthew 15:18-19 (NASB)**

We are like a thermostat. Our internal spiritual condition determines our external behavior. Or, we could say our external behavior reveals how our internal thermostat has been set. If there is a fire inside the house, there will be smoke outside. So if we are not a Christian, our behavior will reveal it. If we are a Christian, our behavior will also reveal it.

Thus, God can refer to our external behavior as the objective proof of the spiritual condition of our hearts. Revelation 20:11-15 teaches us that at the final judgment, God will review the external behavior of the wicked as the proof they deserve to be thrown into the lake of fire. In Matthew 12:35-37, Jesus said we will be judged for every word we have spoken. So, Yahweh will judge the wicked by their external objective

behavior because it reveals the internal spiritual reality of the person.

Now look at Ezekiel 18:23,

**“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?” Ezekiel 18:23 (NASB)**

This verse gives us a third principle that Yahweh does not enjoy the physical or spiritual death of the wicked.

Verse 24 now reveals what happens to the righteous man who becomes evil.

**“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.” Ezekiel 18:24 (NASB)**

Again, Yahweh is talking about a pattern of life - not some isolated acts of wickedness or righteousness. It is a picture of a righteous man who becomes a wicked man. Yahweh said this man’s righteous deeds will not be remembered because he is acting like a wicked man. His change in behavior reveals that he was never really a righteous man. Notice two things. First, Yahweh focuses on the man’s behavior in his last days upon the earth. The apostle Paul rejoiced in 2 Timothy 4:7 that he had fought the good fight and finished the course. He said, “I have kept the faith.” Unbelievers will not keep the faith. That is the message of 1 John 2:19. Second, notice that Yahweh accused this man of treachery. Why? He appeared to be something that he was not. He was never righteous. He was treacherous. Jesus would have called him a tare who only looked like one who believed in Yahweh.

Then in verses 25-26, the Israelites complained once again.

**“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? 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.” Ezekiel 18:25-26 (NASB)

Apparently, the Israelites objected to the idea that a man would not be given credit for his righteous deeds. The fact is the man was never righteous. He was treacherous. He was a tare.

Verses 27-28 now give us the opposite example,

“Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.” Ezekiel 18:27-28 (NASB)

Then verse 29 gives Israel’s third complaint,

“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?” Ezekiel 18:29 (NASB)

Now we have our fourth principle. Every person is responsible for their own sins. Our parents, culture, neighborhood, or environment cannot be blamed for the choices we make. If our pattern of life is wickedness, we will die both physically and spiritually. If our pattern of life is righteousness, we will live physically and have eternal life.

**FIFTH PRINCIPLE IN EZEKIEL 18:30-32.** The last principle of the study is given in verses 30-32. Here is verse 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.” Ezekiel 18:30 (NASB)

The conclusion is that Yahweh will judge every person according to their deeds. God will not judge them according to the deeds of their forefathers or anyone else. The judgment is based on what we do. So, Yahweh calls us to repent and turn away from all of our transgressions. As soon as we read, “. . . turn away from all your transgressions,” we realize that no one can do that by our own strength and effort. Also notice that

Yahweh reveals our own sins can be a stumbling block to us. We become desensitized by our sins. Consequently, we may sin even more.

Therefore, Yahweh gave the solution to our problem in verse 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?” Ezekiel 18:31 (NASB)

Yahweh revealed the real solution to living a righteous life is that we need a new heart and a new spirit. This can only occur by an act of God from heaven. In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. The Greek actually says born “from above.” Jesus was referring to a transformation that is caused by the Holy Spirit. That is how a person can be righteous and have eternal life. Otherwise, the person may die physically in this life and also die spiritually.

It is important we do not miss Yahweh’s statement that we need “a new heart and a new spirit.” Anyone who just acts righteously without a new heart is a Pharisee who is into keeping rules. That describes every religion, cult, and every false Christian. They are into ritual. But Yahweh says we need a new heart. We need a heart that loves God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. When we have a new heart, we will desire to please Him. That is why we desire to be righteous, and our lives will evidence a pattern of righteousness. I am sorry to say that many people enjoy keeping rules, and they think they are a Christian. But Yahweh says we need a new heart and a new spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms us and the result is a heart that wants to please Him by godly behavior. Now that is a righteous person.

Our final verse says.

“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.” Ezekiel 18:32 (NASB)

This gives us our fifth principle; Yahweh does not desire for anyone to die. Therefore, repent, and live—in this life and the next. So, the choice is ours. Repentance is the first sign of a

new heart and new spirit. If our behavior does not change, then we do not have a new heart and a new spirit. Yahweh's message is the decision is ours!

My final comment is that Ezekiel 18 is a unique chapter because it presents the gospel for us in the Old Testament.