

**International Sunday School Lesson  
Study Notes  
August 16, 2015**

**Lesson Text: Ezekiel 18:1-13, 31-32  
Lesson Title: A Call for Repentance**

**Introduction**

The prophet Ezekiel was born during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.). He was from a priestly family, was married (Ezekiel 24:15-18) but there is no record of any children. People from Judah were taken into exile in Babylon on three occasions. Nebuchadnezzar took a small group of Jews to Babylon, including Daniel and his three friends in 605 B.C. A few years later the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and took King Jehoiachin and over 10,000 more captives into exile in 597 B.C. Ezekiel, who was twenty-five years old at this time was among those deported to Babylon. At the age of thirty God called him to be a prophet when he saw the glory of God near the Chebar canal in Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1-3). At that time he was filled with the Spirit of God and became dumb, unable to speak except when God opened his mouth (Ezekiel 2:1, 2; 3:24-27). Ezekiel performed several sign messages and received a number of visions about what was going on in Jerusalem while he was in Babylon.

Jeremiah was the prophet who told the people of Judah and Jerusalem about judgment to come. Ezekiel was the prophet who spoke to the people after judgment had overtaken them. Both prophets told the people what they had done to deserve God's judgment, and both told the people what God would yet do in the future. The people of Judah must have felt that they were a forsaken people. Their city lay in ruins, their temple had been destroyed, and the nation was scattered.

The significance of our lesson text is that it sets forth God's concern for His disobedient people. Ezekiel became a symbol to the people of God's concern for them. He prophesied a message that challenged them to repentance and a renewed faith in the Lord.

**The Call to Repentance and Accountability (Ezekiel 18:1-13)**

The Jews, in Ezekiel's day, complained of God dealing hard with them because of the sins of their forefathers. Ezekiel penned the words of this chapter to correct their thinking. Ezekiel 18 has one great theme. Man is responsible for his choices and his actions. He cannot blame anyone for his own sin. Neither can he be made right with God by the repentance of others.

Verse 1-2

“The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, 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?”

The exiles were repeating a “proverb” that was circulating in Jerusalem and Judah: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” What does this proverb mean? Before ripening, young tender grapes are very “sour.” When you eat sour foods, your teeth “are set on edge” or reacts with sensitivity. It is the same reaction as when you bite into a lemon or another tart food. So, this “proverb” is saying “the children’s teeth” are sensitive and “set on edge,” because their “father’s” are eating sour grapes. Basically, they were saying that the children were suffering in exile because of their father’s sin.

If this “proverb” or saying was true, then God would indeed be unjust. That was what the people thought according to Ezekiel 18:25, “*Yet ye say, The way of the LORD is not equal...*” The problem with the parable was that the people believed it and it led to fatalism and irresponsibility. If I am being judged for the sins of the past, then nothing I do now can change it. Therefore, why bother to repent? What will be, will be.

### Verse 3

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

Because the exiles and those in Jerusalem were repeating this proverb, God made sure Ezekiel clarified for them that not only was their conclusion wrong, it is also contrary to the way God executes justice and judgment. “Ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel” means God is going to settle this question once for all. After God says what He is about to say, no one will ever doubt again that each individual is responsible and accountable for his or her own sin.

### Verse 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.”

“Behold, all souls are mine” means every “soul,” that is, every living being belongs to the Lord. Depending upon your relationship to the Lord, that truth is either a comfort or a threat. If you are a Christian, it is a comfort to know that you belong to the Lord through saving faith in Jesus Christ. If you are an unbeliever, then you must live with the fear of eternal separation from God and eternal judgment.

“Soul” here does not refer to the non-material part of man separated from his body at death, but rather to the totality of a person, his whole life, his entire being. Every “soul” belongs to the Lord. “Father” and “son” alike. The “soul” or individual that “sinneth,” will “die” for his or her own sin, not for the sin of others.

*Note: Today, there is still a belief among many Christians called “generational curses.” It teaches that Christians can suffer punishment from the Lord because of the sins of their parents or grandparents. This belief is based upon an improper interpretation of Exodus 20:4-6. Certainly children can repeat the sins of their fathers (Psalm 106:6). A son will often sin in the same manner as his father. Isaac lied about his wife as did his father Abraham. That is what God means by “visiting the iniquity of the father” down the generations. It is not punishment, it is the natural result of your sin habits being passed down to your children.*

If you are being punished because of sin, it is your sin. If you die lost and dwell in torment forever, it is because you are a sinner and never called on the Lord for salvation. Each individual is accountable for his or her relationship to the Lord.

#### Verse 5-9

“But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, 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, 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; 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, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.”

The Lord says that if a man is righteous, then “he shall surely live.” The Israelites were complaining in their proverb that God was punishing them because of their father’s sins. But God responds that if they live righteously, then they will “live.” It is as simple as that.

God tells them how to live righteously. He says, “Do not eat upon the mountains.” That means they were not to eat at the pagan shrines or altars. He continues, “Do not lift up your eyes to the idols of the house of Israel.” They were not to worship the popular idols of the day. “Neither defile your neighbour’s wife” meant sexual relations with another man’s wife was forbidden. “Neither come near a menstruous woman” means sexual relations

with a woman during her time of menstrual impurity was forbidden. This was a prohibition against casual sensual sexual relationships (vv.5-6)

Those who live righteous must also avoid “oppressing” or bullying people, accumulating debt, using violence to steal, refusing to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (v.7). Furthermore, those who live righteous do not exploit the poor by “usury” or interest rates on loans, refuses to live dishonestly, “executes true judgment” or is fair to everyone, and can be trusted “between man and man.” In other words, people trust a righteous man (v.8).

A righteous man “walked in my statues, and hath kept my judgments.” That means he obeys God’s laws and is knowledgeable of what God requires. He “deals truly” speaks of a fair and dependable man. “He is just, he shall surely live, saith the LORD God.” God declares that the righteous man will live and not suffer punishment or judgment.

“He is just, he shall surely live” does not exempt the righteous from the curse of physical death. The “just” do die physically for many reasons that do not contradict this principle of promised life. Old age, martyrdom, death in battle are several reasons the righteous die. The principle is, the “just” shall “live” no matter what the character of his parents or children. The Jews were not in judgment or facing death because of their parent’s sin. That is the point God is making (Proverbs 3:1-2; Amos 5:4).

### Verse 10-13

“If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things, And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife, 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, 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.”

“He” in this verse is a reference to the just or righteous man. The point here is this, if generational curses cause the children to suffer because of their parent’s unrighteousness, then you would conclude that if a parent lived righteous his children would live because of his parent’s righteousness. “Shall he then live?” The answer is no. “If he,” a righteous man, has “a son” that is “a robber, shedder of blood” and does everything God has told him not to do, such as worship idols, oppress the poor, use violence to get what he wants, God says, “He shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.” Once again, the point is each individual is accountable for his own righteousness or his sin. A man is not going to sin and be granted life just because his father or grandfather was righteous. Also, a righteous man may have a son who is wicked. His son’s

wickedness will not result in a curse upon the righteous father, because he “doeth not any of those duties” (v.11).

Deuteronomy 24:16 says it best, *“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 Call to Repentance and Opportunity (Ezekiel 18:31-32)**

This particular portion of our lesson sums up the message of Ezekiel. He comes to grips with the spiritual needs of the people, explaining to them the basis on which they can return to the Lord. Ezekiel’s words reveal the heart of love that God extends to all people. His justice is not vindictive and cruel. God deals with us and convicts us so we will repent and return to Him.

#### Verse 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?”

God makes the appeal for His people to “cast away” from their “transgressions.” If they are worried about dying, and about being judged, then they should repent (Ezekiel 18:30). The reality of coming judgment made repentance necessary. It was the only way to avoid disaster. Repentance is still the only way to avoid eternal damnation (Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3-5; Acts 17:30).

“For why will ye die” means they do not have to die, they can turn from their wickedness if they so choose. God wants people to repent. He wants people to lead lives of righteousness. Having “cast away” or cleansed their lives from their rebellion and sin against the Lord, the people would receive “a new heart and a new spirit.” “Make you” does not mean this is something a person can do for himself; it is the gift of God (Ezekiel 36:26; Philippians 2:12-13). When Christ comes into our life and saves us by His grace, *“...old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

#### Verse 32

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

God has “no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.” Those who choose to live ungodly and suffer the temporal and eternal consequences of judgment and torment do so because of their own choice. God says, “Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.” His appeal is clear: “Turn and live.” We must never allow the fact and certainty of God’s judgment to cloud our view of His desire

for us to repent. Sinners need never doubt that God takes “no pleasure” in those who reject His love and spurn His call for repentance. Sinners need never perish.

### **Conclusion**

Our lesson has centered upon two great truths, personal responsibility for righteousness and unrighteousness and the privilege of new life through genuine repentance. These truths are always inseparable. If any man is to experience new life in Christ he must take responsibility for his sin and turn from that sin through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever taken responsibility for your sinfulness? Do you blame others for your lot in life? Perhaps you need to make a choice today to confess your sins to the Lord (1 John 1:9). If you do, Jesus promises that you can live (John 10:10).

Amen.