

## Ezekiel Chapters 17 and 18 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "dealing with the blame game". Most of us have a tendency in an argument to focus the blame on anyone but ourselves. This method first started in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:12-13) and things have not improved through the history of mankind. ☺
  - a) I state this because both Chapters 17 and 18 deal with the issue of the guilty party refusing to look at themselves but blame others.
2. Chapter 17 is a riddle that Ezekiel tells. The riddle is explained in the second half of the chapter, so there is no mystery as to its meaning. The riddle involves two birds (eagles) and a tree. There were two great eagles, which represented the Babylonian Empire and the Egyptians. These were the two great powers of the region at this time. There was also a tree that represented Israel.
  - a) The point of the story is that the Babylonians put the current Jewish king in power. This Jewish king should have remained loyal to the Babylonians, but instead, secretly sought an alliance with the Egyptians. We'll learn this new alliance will fail and God wanted the Jewish king should have remained loyal to the Babylonians.
  - b) It would be good to remember the terms: "Israel, Judah and Jerusalem". The northern kingdom of Israel no longer exists. The southern kingdom is all that remains of a Jewish homeland and it was called "Judah". The capital of Judah is Jerusalem. When I say "Israelites" I usually mean those who Jewish people living in the kingdom of Judah.
  - c) The main moral of the chapter has to do with keeping one's commitments. The king of Judah made an oath to be loyal to the emperor of Babylon. When one of God's people makes an oath (i.e., a promise), He expects us to keep that oath as His name and His reputation are at stake when we make such an oath. God's name is "on the line" when we make a commitment and people know that we trust in our God. Therefore, it is necessary to keep such a commitment.
    - i) Jesus discouraged us from swearing oaths (See Matthew 5:33-37), but Jesus also went on to imply that if we make such an oath, we better keep our word. It is the same idea that is being taught here in this chapter.
  - d) The Jewish people preferred their independence over being subject to the Babylonian Empire. That is why the Jewish king sought an alliance with Egypt. The problem is that the king of Judah made a commitment to Babylon and now God's "name" is at stake.
    - i) One of the reasons God destroyed the nation of Judah was because the king of Judah betrayed his allegiance to Babylon by trying to make a treaty with Egypt.
    - ii) Think about this from Egypt's point of view: Why should we trust this Jewish king when they didn't keep their promises to Babylon?
    - iii) The point is once you have a reputation for not keeping your promises no one else will trust you either. This is another reason why God expects us to keep our oaths (promises) that we make, whether or not those were good promises to make.
  - e) This leads back to the blame issue in my opening statement. The Israelites blamed the Babylonians for destroying their country when in fact they should have been looking at themselves for failing to keep their promises.
    - i) Someone can think: Well, but it was the king who approached Egypt. Why blame everyone else? The answer is probably that it was the "will" of the Jewish people to do anything and everything to get rid of the Babylonians. I suspect the majority of the Jewish adults were in favor of doing anything and everything to prevent the Babylonians from taking over and the king was doing what the people wanted.
  - f) Chapter 17 ends with a few verses about the Promised Messiah. It is as if God is saying, "I know things are bad, but I will still keep My promises to You as a nation one day! The chapter ends on a positive note of a king (Messiah) that will rule over the world one day.

3. This leads us to Chapter 18. This chapter is a whole new topic, but the "blame theme" is the same.
  - a) The main point of this chapter is that there was a common expression going around the Jewish people which said in effect, "It is due to the sins of our forefathers that we are suffering at the hands of the Babylonians. In other words, it is not our fault!"
  - b) The Jews living at that time refused to believe it was their own sins that was causing the Babylonians to attack. They were saying they had to suffer due to the sins of those living before them. It is the old excuse of, "It is not my fault, but it is because of how my parents are, that I am in this situation".
  - c) Do we have issues in our lives due to the way we were raised and our environment? Of course. At the same time, when one becomes an adult, there has to be a point where one stops being a victim of their past circumstances and takes responsibility for one's self. That is part of "growing up".
  - d) God Himself lays out principals regarding individual responsibility in this chapter.
    - i) The idea is that eternal judgment is based on how we lived our lives and not based on the sins of anyone else.
    - ii) At the same time, we as parents have to "let go" of our children at some point and let them be responsible for their own actions. Yes, they will always be our children, and yes we can help when they ask for it. At the same time, grown children have to take responsibility for their own actions and if the parents keep "bailing them out" they never grow up.
  - e) I realize I am over-simplifying some complicated issues, but the key point is that we have to take responsibility for our own actions and not put the blame on others.
  - f) Chapter 18 is one big lecture on individual responsibility. Tying that to the Babylonians taking over Israel, the point is the Jewish people were trying to use their "forefathers" as an excuse for God's punishment and God is responding by saying in effect, "Hey take a look at your own lives for a moment!" The point is the Jewish people were presently guilty and they should not be blaming their "forefathers" for their own sins.
  - g) Once again, my introduction is on a not-so-happy note, ☺ so let me quit lecturing at this point and start into the text.
4. Chapter 17, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell the house of Israel a parable.
  - a) As I stated in the introduction, Chapter 17 is a "parable". This story is not to be taken literally. It is designed to teach a point. Ezekiel explains the parable in the text right after the parable so we don't have to guess what the parable means.
  - b) OK, the parable begins in Verse 3.
5. Verse 3: Say to them, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, <sup>4</sup> he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders.
  - a) As I explain the meaning of this parable, remember that I have the advantage of reading and studying "ahead" and that gives much of the meaning. There are also cross references elsewhere in the bible to some of the details in this chapter, and I'll explain those as we work our way through this story.
  - b) Keep in mind the moral of the story, which is "honoring the oaths" we make in life. In this case, it is about the king of Judah failing to keep his promises to the Babylonian Emperor.
  - c) Notice the words "Sovereign Lord". Ezekiel is emphasizing how God is in charge and this is what he has to say.
  - d) The next part of this parable mentions a great eagle. We know from later in this chapter that the eagle represents the Babylonian Empire and its leader.
    - i) The idea of "powerful wings" and "long feathers" represents the fact this Babylonian kingdom has great power and influence over other nations.

- ii) The idea of the feathers also helps to indicate how many nations were covered by this empire. Remember that the Babylonian empire had already conquered many of the other nations, including the Assyrians who conquered the northern kingdom of Israel over a hundred years earlier. The fact the eagle has various colors probably refers to the many nations it has conquered.
    - iii) The main thing to remember about this point in history is that the Babylonians dominated a large region, just as the Greeks and then the Romans did many centuries later. It may also help to remember the bible tends to keep track of human history as it relates to the Nation of Israel. Therefore, the nations that conquer and rule over Israel become prominent in the bible.
    - iv) Keep in mind we are reading a parable to be contemplated. That is why God, through Ezekiel is speaking in a riddle, as opposed to just saying, "There was a great kingdom called Babylon". ☺
  - e) In the next part of the parable, this great eagle, takes a cedar from Lebanon.
    - i) Note that Lebanon is not part of Israel, but is a city (and a kingdom) just north of Israel. Lebanon is known for its mighty cedar trees. When Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem centuries earlier, it was built using cedars from Lebanon.
    - ii) This part of the riddle refers to the Jewish kings, and in particular, the current king of Judah at this time. The idea within the parable is that just as the trees from Lebanon were picked for the king's palace, so God choose the descendants of King David to be rulers in Jerusalem.
  - f) Now let's review the final sentence in Verses 3-4. It says, "Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders."
    - i) The "top of the cedar" refers to the current king of Judah, who was Zedekiah.
    - ii) The word "he" refers to the great eagle, which is the king of Babylon.
    - iii) The king of Judah was taken prisoner and was to live in exile in Babylon.
    - iv) The Babylonians are referred to as "merchants" and "traders". The main economy of the Israelites was farming. The main economy for the Babylonians was by trading with others.
6. Verse 5: "He took some of the seed of your land and put it in fertile soil. He planted it like a willow by abundant water, <sup>6</sup> and it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine. Its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out leafy boughs.
- a) Remember this story is about two eagles and a tree. So far, we only have a description of the first eagle, which represents the Babylonians. In these verses, we have a "willow tree" (a symbol for Israel). The tree spread "low" and had spreading vines. The vines spread toward "him", which is the eagle. The verse goes on to say the roots remained under "it", which again is the eagle. God wanted the Israelites to "bow low" to the Babylonians.
    - i) It was God's desire for the Israelites to be in subjection to the Babylonians for their disobedience. It was only after "more disobedience" that God took their punishment to the next level and kicked the Israelites out of the land.
  - b) At this point, God is describing that it was His goal to have the Israelites in subjection to the Babylonians, but still live in the Promised Land. Even though the king of Judah was taken to Babylon, God wanted the Jewish people to "flourish" as part of the Babylonian empire. The idea is Judah is to loyally serve the Babylonians.
  - c) It is a little confusing as in earlier chapters we were describing the siege of Jerusalem. The point is before the siege began, those Israelites were told to be subject to Babylon, but at the same time their "culture" was surviving in tact and it was God's desire that they flourish while still being subject to the Babylonians. It is because the Israelites rebelled against the Babylonians that they got into more trouble.

- d) Remember that God is trying to teach through this parable that the Israelites were disobedient to God's plans for their lives. The lesson is about the danger of going against God's will for our lives, even if we don't like His will of the moment.
  - e) The other key issue is that God expects us to keep our promises. The Israelites agreed, through their king to be in subjection to the Babylonians. God expects them and us to honor our commitments because His name is at stake as we are His witnesses.
7. Verse 7: "'But there was another great eagle with powerful wings and full plumage. The vine now sent out its roots toward him from the plot where it was planted and stretched out its branches to him for water. <sup>8</sup> It had been planted in good soil by abundant water so that it would produce branches, bear fruit and become a splendid vine.'
- a) In these verses we get introduced to the second eagle. We'll discover in later verses that this refers to Egypt. If one knows their ancient history, they would know that Egypt was a great power in the region for millennia.
  - b) The point of this verse is the "vine", which is part of the tree (ok, plant) illustration is now reaching out to Egypt for help. The King of Judah is asking Egypt for protection from the Babylonians. At this point in history, the Babylonians had not yet confronted the Egyptians, but historically, that happened soon after this, where the Babylonians won a key battle that affected the course of human history for centuries.
    - i) My point is that God will not permit the Egyptians to help the Israelites.
  - c) Getting back to the verses, the point is the "Israelites" were planted in a good physical land where they could thrive and they should not be looking to Egypt for help.
8. Verse 9: "Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Will it thrive? Will it not be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so that it withers? All its new growth will wither. It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it up by the roots. <sup>10</sup> Even if it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not wither completely when the east wind strikes it--wither away in the plot where it grew?' "
- a) The essential idea is that when the "vine" (i.e., the Jewish people) turn to Egypt for help, it will not work. The Jewish people understood that they were historically compared to a vine. Ezekiel has used that comparison before, as has other prophets.
  - b) The Israelites should "figure out" the parable that among the two great powers of that region, the "Babylonians and the Egyptian's". The essential idea of this parable that the Israelite's effort to get out from the Babylonians will not work.
  - c) With that said, this is the end of the parable itself. The rest of the chapter is Ezekiel explaining the meaning of the parable, as if you haven't gotten it so far. ☺
9. Verse 11: Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>12</sup> "Say to this rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things mean?' Say to them: 'The king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and carried off her king and her nobles, bringing them back with him to Babylon. <sup>13</sup> Then he took a member of the royal family and made a treaty with him, putting him under oath. He also carried away the leading men of the land, <sup>14</sup> so that the kingdom would be brought low, unable to rise again, surviving only by keeping his treaty. <sup>15</sup> But the king rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt to get horses and a large army. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Will he break the treaty and yet escape?
- a) Remember that up to Verse 11, we "just" had a riddle. Those listening to Ezekiel speak did not necessarily know what he meant. Verse 11, Ezekiel has a second vision where the explanation of the first 10 verses comes into play. If you have any doubts about my interpretations, you can read these verses and compare them to my earlier comments.
  - b) Let's start with Verse 12. It says the King of Babylon took the king and leaders of Judah and took them to Babylon. If you want a "cross reference" to this section, 2nd Chronicles Chapter 36 gives more details of this shame story.
  - c) Verse 13 makes a "key point": It says the king of Babylon put a member of the royal (Jewish) family under an oath.

- d) Cross-referencing this story with 2nd Chronicles Chapter 36, the king of Babylon took a relative of the King of Judah and made him the king instead of the one in exile. The key is the "new king" gave an oath. God expected that king to honor that oath because the new king was part of "God's people" and therefore, God's reputation is on the line.
  - e) The next point is because the leaders of Judah were taken to Babylon those still living Judah were more dependant upon Babylon for its survival. The only way the kingdom of Judah would survive is if they honored their treaty with Babylon.
  - f) This leads to the next historical point: The new king of Judah still rebelled against Babylon and tried to make a treaty with Egypt. Verse 15 says in effect that such an effort will not work. God expected the people of Judah to honor that commitment to Babylon.
  - g) OK John, this is all interesting history. What does any of it have to do with my life? ☺  
The answer is God expects us to keep our oaths, our words and our commitments. God may find a way to bring justice upon us if we fail to do what we commit to doing. It is not a matter of the oath being a good or bad decision. The issue is that we have a reputation of being a servant of the true God, and He cares about His name and His reputation and therefore, we have to honor such commitments as much as possible.
    - i) There is an old Christian expression that goes, "God will not let His people get away with anything". What that means is non-believers are more likely to get away with not keeping their word than believers. Why is that? Because God cares about His name and His reputation.
10. Verse 16: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, he shall die in Babylon, in the land of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose treaty he broke.
- a) Well, so much for the king of Judah trying to double-cross the king of Babylon. Elsewhere in the bible, there was a prediction made about the same king being made blind right after the king's sons were killed and then the blind king was taken to Babylon. This verse is describing the fate of the same king. (See: 2nd Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52:7.)
11. Verse 17: Pharaoh with his mighty army and great horde will be of no help to him in war, when ramps are built and siege works erected to destroy many lives.<sup>18</sup> He despised the oath by breaking the covenant. Because he had given his hand in pledge and yet did all these things, he shall not escape.
- a) These verses are again describing the siege against Jerusalem. The point here is that the Pharaoh's armies (the king of Egypt) won't be of any help to stop this from happening.
  - b) This also shows that it was not the original intent of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. The "original idea" was to have a Jewish king who would serve Babylon. When this last king of Judah rebelled against Babylon and turned to Egypt for help, is when Babylon said in effect, "I've had it with these people" and that is when the siege happened.
12. Verse 19: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, I will bring down on his head my oath that he despised and my covenant that he broke.<sup>20</sup> I will spread my net for him, and he will be caught in my snare. I will bring him to Babylon and execute judgment upon him there because he was unfaithful to me.<sup>21</sup> All his fleeing troops will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to the winds. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken.
- a) In these verses, we finish the description of the fall of the king of Jerusalem.
  - b) The point is all the Jewish people will know that the rebellion against Babylon will come to nothing and God's people will be punished for failing to keep their oaths.
  - c) OK John, once again, this is all interesting history. What does this mean for me? It means there is a price to pay for disobedience to God. It may not be anything as dramatic as widespread death and destruction of a nation, but I do guarantee God does discipline those who make oaths and commitments in His name and then disobey.
  - d) Remember that once we are "born-again", God works on us to help us do His will. Sometimes God disciplines us and that includes punishment when we disobey Him.

13. Verse 22: " `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup> On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. <sup>24</sup> All the trees of the field will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. " `I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.' "
- a) There is an interesting pattern that emerges in Ezekiel. Every few chapters, there is one verse or a few verses about something positive. It is as if God is thinking, "This is enough doom and gloom. Let's throw in something positive so I won't lose my audience." ☺
    - i) I say this as these three verses stop the focus on the destruction of Israel as a nation and focus on the promise of a coming Messiah.
    - ii) It is as if God is saying, "Yes things are bad in Israel. Yes the people deserve this punishment as they refuse to listen to me. Despite all of that, I (God) will still keep my promise to send a Messiah (king who rules forever) to them."
    - iii) Think about it this way: If God is still promising to send a Messiah to the Jewish people, that means that God needs them to be united again in the Promised Land. That means that the punishment in the land of Israel is not forever.
  - b) Verse 22 starts with God saying " I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar".
    - i) If you recall from earlier in the chapter, the leadership of Jerusalem was compared to the cedar trees of Lebanon because those trees were used to build the temple.
    - ii) The idea was that just like a cedar tree grows tall from a small seed, so God did raise up kings over his people. They were descendants of the lineage of David.
    - iii) What is implied is that this promised "king" will also be of the lineage of David.
  - c) The next line of Verse 22 says, "I will break off a tender sprig".
    - i) The idea is the Messiah will come from the line of David, but in a sense, he will come from "nowhere". The Messiah is compared to a small branch that comes from this mighty cedar, which God will raise up to be the Messiah.
  - d) What is also implied is that since the Babylonians will bring an end to the Jewish nation, God still has plans for His people and a future eternal ruler will come one day, who is also of the lineage of David.
    - i) For those who don't know, Jesus is a son of David both by His mother and father.
    - ii) Jesus mother's Mary, was a descendant of another son of David in that Mary did not have all the Jewish kings as part of her ancestry.
    - iii) Jesus step-father Joseph was a descendant of the Jewish kings who were the offspring of David. People sometimes wonder how Jesus is the son of Joseph with the virgin birth. The answer is "legal adoption". When a Jewish man agrees to marry a woman, he also inherits all of her possessions, which would include her son Jesus. Joseph is the legal father by Jewish law as well as Roman law (and American law while I'm at it), even though he is not the natural father.
  - e) Next, we read that this branch of the cedar will, "produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar."
    - i) The idea is this "branch of a cedar" will itself become a mighty tree and bear fruit.
    - ii) Jesus "bears fruit" in that billions believe in Him as the Son of God.
    - iii) At the same time, Jesus never ruled over the Jewish people. There is a New Testament prediction that Jesus will one day rule from the throne of His father David in Jerusalem (See Luke 1:32). This is one reason why the Jewish people rejected Jesus as he didn't rule over Israel as a nation. Christians see this as part of His Second Coming.
    - iv) I state all of this because a Jewish interpretation of a "splendid cedar" would be a king that rules the world from Israel.

- f) Verse 23 says, "Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in...its branches."
    - i) This prediction is part of the "riddle explanation" that ties to the "small shoot that becomes a mighty tree" who will not only rule over Israel, but other nations.
    - ii) The idea is that Messiah will not only be a king for the Jewish people, but for many other non-Jews who will recognize the Messiah as being sent from God.
    - iii) I can get into more details here, but you get the idea.
  - g) Verse 24 says, "All the trees of the field will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall."
    - i) God is predicting that other nations will know that He himself has brought Israel "down to nothing" and is responsible for their punishment. At the same time other nations will know that God will raise up a new king.
    - ii) Remember that after 70 years, the Israelite people were back in the land again. However, they never again had an independent king that ruled over them. The Israelites were under the domain of the Babylonians, then the Persian Empire, then the Greeks, and then the Romans. During all of that time, no descendant of David ever ruled over the nation.
    - iii) Until Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD, the Jews still kept detailed birth records. Jewish people could trace their ancestral line, which is why we know both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David. When the Romans destroyed the Second Jewish Temple in 70AD, those records were lost.
    - iv) My point is God made it "as obvious as possible" that Jesus, who came from a "nothing background" became the mighty cedar as billions of non-Jewish people recognize Him as the promised Messiah. Further, no other descendant of David could rise up to claim the "Messiah-ship" since we can't prove anymore if anyone is a son of David.
  - h) Remember the big issue at hand: The end of Israel as a nation. God compares Israel as a tree in this chapter that should have "bowed low" to Babylon, but went against their own oath and tried to make an alliance with Egypt.
    - i) God is saying in effect here, "Look, even though you, the Jewish people have failed to keep your promises, I God, will still keep My promises about one day having Israel united as a people and a king (Messiah) ruling over the people.
  - i) Back to my favorite question: How does any of this affect my life today? We already believe Jesus is the promised Messiah and this is "old news" for us. If God does not give up on the Israelites despite all of their sins, He will not give up on us despite all the mistakes we make in our lives. God's promise of eternal salvation is unconditional despite the sins and mistakes we make.
    - i) On that good news, we can start chapter 18. ☺
14. Chapter 18, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?"
- a) Chapter 18 opens with a new topic. Apparently, there was a popular expression among the Jewish people still that goes, "'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?" That expression was so popular at that time it is being quoted among the Jewish people living in exile with Ezekiel.
  - b) First, let me give a modern equivalent of that expression. "Our fathers have sinned and now we have to suffer the consequences". In other words, the Israelites are saying, "It is not our fault we are suffering at the moment. It is due to the sins of those who lived before us that we are now dealing with these problems".
    - i) God is going to spend the rest of this chapter (through Ezekiel) refuting that argument by saying in effect, "You have no one to blame but yourself."

- c) There is some truth to this expression. There is a principal in the 10 commandments that one's sins can be past on to one's children and grandchildren. (See Exodus 20, Verse 5). What that verse meant in Exodus is that when a person sins, the effects can be felt for several generations. The second thing is that people often emulate their parents and if their parents turn away from God, often their children will follow.
    - i) The difference between "Exodus 20:5" and Ezekiel Chapter 18 is that both principals are true. Ezekiel is going to teach that everyone (i.e., everyone who reaches an age of accountability) is accountable for their own actions. Yes, bad parents (i.e., those who turn from God) usually have children who do likewise, but God holds everyone accountable individually.
  - d) The other principal we will see in this chapter is that it is the guilt of "this" generation of Israelites is as bad, if not worse than the sins of the previous generation. Yes, the previous generations lead up to this point, but the fact that the Israelites rebelled against Babylon even after both Jeremiah and Ezekiel preach otherwise, is a sign that this particular generation have themselves to blame, let alone all of the other idolatry that has already been discussed so far in Ezekiel.
15. Verse 3: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. <sup>4</sup> For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son--both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.
- a) God is saying that this proverb about "sour grapes" will no longer be quoted as a truth. God is going to show that everyone will be individually accountable to God.
  - b) Verse 4 says that all souls belong to God. We are individually judged based on how we lived our lives.
16. Verse 5: "Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right.
- a) In Verse 5, God is saying that a person who is "right" in God's eyes will be saved.
  - b) Verses 6 through 9 give examples of what God means by being "right" in His eyes.
17. Verse 6: "He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife or lie with a woman during her period. <sup>7</sup> He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. <sup>8</sup> He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. <sup>9</sup> He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) First, let me say that these verses are not a complete list of "how to be pleasing in God's eyes". They are examples from "The Law". It is not a matter of just obeying these principals listing in Verses 6-9 and then one is "in". It is a matter of being obedient to God in all that one does.
  - b) It's time to discuss "Christians and the Law". The New Testament clearly says that Christians are not under the law. (See Galatians 5:18). God's standards for "being right" have not changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The difference is we as Christians accept Jesus payment for our violations of God's laws. At the same time, Christians are called to "live for God" and not for ourselves. The idea is we as Christians are to make every effort to live our lives as pleasing to God. If we do that, it is amazing how much of the law we end up obeying "by faith" as opposed to working at it.
    - i) With that said, we can now discuss some of the principals of Verses 6 through 9.
- c) The first example Ezekiel gives is "He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel".
    - i) Remember that the main reason the Jewish people are being punished as a nation is that they turned to idolatry instead of worshiping God. In Verse 6, the first thing God mentions is "mountain shrines". The idea is Jewish people were worshipping false gods at shrines they built.



- ii) When people reject the true God, they don't just "worship nothing". All people have a built-in desire to worship something. When we reject God, we turn elsewhere. That is why God starts with this principal.
  - d) The second example is about a married man having sex with another woman or one's own wife during her menstrual period. This latter one is forbidden in the law as Jews were to avoid "blood" and a menstrual period was a sign that "life" was being lost.
    - i) The underlying point is that when one does not care about God, one is looking for an excuse to violate God's laws. A man will turn to another woman other than his wife or even violate God's own standards for sexual purity.
  - e) The next principal is the righteous man does not steal and does give to those in need.
    - i) It would be obvious that stealing is forbidden. God takes this one step further in that a person who cares about God also cares about those who are suffering around him! The idea is a man of God cares about the suffering of others.
  - f) Next is the idea of charging "usury". The idea is that one is not to take advantage of another by charging excessively high interest rates to help someone in need. Let's say you know someone is broke and you give him money for food. You then charge him 100% interest per day to pay you back. That's an example of "usury".
  - g) Finally is the principal of being "fair" in judging between men. The idea is that if one wants to please God, then one does not show partiality and favoritism in dealings.
  - h) This list is not an all inclusive list of do's and don'ts. If one cares about pleasing God, then things like those given in this list just "naturally" follow our desire to please God.
18. Verse 10: "Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things <sup>11</sup> (though the father has done none of them): "He eats at the mountain shrines. He defiles his neighbor's wife. <sup>12</sup> He oppresses the poor and needy. He commits robbery. He does not return what he took in pledge. He looks to the idols. He does detestable things. <sup>13</sup> He lends at usury and takes excessive interest. Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he will surely be put to death and his blood will be on his own head.
- a) The main principal of these verses is listed in Verse 10. The idea is that if a person is righteous, but the righteous' man's son turns from God, then the son will go to hell, but the father will not. Verses 11-13 give examples of how one turns from God.
  - b) First, let me talk a little about raising one's children. God holds all of us accountable. I find that children who are raised in a healthy God-fearing environment, are more likely to follow God like their parents, but it is not guaranteed. In other words, God does hold parents accountable to raise their children right, but once children grow up, they are individually accountable.
    - i) One of my favorite talk show hosts likes to argue that there is an element of "luck" with how children turn out in life. What he meant by that is he has seen children raised in really good homes turn out bad and vice versa. It is not a guarantee that children have the same values as their parents despite the parents every effort to raise the children like themselves. I believe that same principal is in these verses in that God holds each of us accountable no matter what is our background.
  - c) With that happy thought out of my system, ☺ I can discuss the rest of these verses.
  - d) I don't have to give details of these verses, as the principals are the same as those from the previous set of verses. The verses start by saying if a person "sheds blood". The idea is a person is guilty of murder even though his parents didn't do this (or approve of this).
    - i) The examples go on to comment on worshipping at shrines to idols, robbery, not following through on pledges, lends at "usury" rates, etc.
  - e) The point of is that a person cannot say, "It is my parent's fault I turned out this way. You can't blame me for the wrongs that I do". I should mention that God holds us accountable based on what knowledge we have of Him. There is a different standard for someone who is old enough to know better versus a child or someone who has mental issues.

19. Verse 14: "But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things: <sup>15</sup> "He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife. <sup>16</sup> He does not oppress anyone or require a pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. <sup>17</sup> He withholds his hand from sin and takes no usury or excessive interest. He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. <sup>18</sup> But his father will die for his own sin, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people.
- a) Look at Verse 14 by itself for a moment. Go ahead, I'll wait here. ☺ The verse says that if a son sees a father turn from God but the son does not do likewise and turns to God, then the son will be considered "righteous" and not suffer the eternal fate of the father.
    - i) Does this mean that a son (or a daughter) will not suffer in this lifetime due to the sinful lifestyle of a parent? No. If anything, most children of ungodly parents who turn to God still have to deal with their parents. The point is the children will not be held accountable of the sins of their parents.
  - b) It's not really necessary to comment on the rest of these verses. They are all examples similar to those already given earlier in the chapter. Why are they listed again? It is so if anyone has any doubts as to what it takes to be righteous, it is listed again.
  - c) Do these verses mean I have to be perfect? No. It does mean that if one is seeking God and one "messes up", one can simply ask Him for forgiveness and He does forgive our sins. At the same time, one still have to deal with the sins. Just because God forgives us does not mean we can avoid dealing with the consequences caused by those sins.
  - d) We don't go to hell if we trust in Jesus' payment of our sins and when we sin, we confess them. However, we still have to deal with the consequences of those sins in this lifetime.
20. Verse 19: "Yet you ask, 'Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?' Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. <sup>20</sup> The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.
- a) These verses get to the heart of the issue: God holds us individually accountable to Him. A person cannot be saved because their parents or their spouse pray for them. At the same time, if a person lives a life pleasing to God, that is not good enough to save one's parents or say, one's spouse. We are each individually accountable to God with our lives.
    - i) Here is where I have always had a problem with Mormonism. (I bet you didn't see that coming. ☺) One of their beliefs is about learning who is one's ancestors so that if one becomes a devout Mormon, one can rescue one's dead parents and ancestors to a better life based on how we now live. That principal is refuted by these verses here in Ezekiel.
  - b) The essential idea of this principal is how we live for eternity is based on how we live now. If we have a heart to seek God now, we will for eternity. If we desire to turn from God with our lives now, He "honors that decision" and we turn from Him forever!
    - i) This does tie to these verses. If we are "righteous" now, we will be saved forever and if we are "unrighteous" now, we will be condemned forever.
    - ii) Again, it is not about being perfect, but it is about seeking God with all of our heart and when we mess up, we confess that sin as wrong and then try to live our lives as pleasing to God as much as possible.
21. Verse 21: "But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. <sup>22</sup> None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. <sup>23</sup> Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

- a) Here is one of my favorite principals in the bible. It says, "If a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees ...he will surely live."
    - i) The idea is that if a person has lead a wicked life up to the moment they turn to God, and then turn from their sins, that person will be in heaven forever.
    - ii) What is implied is that it is never too late to turn to God up to the moment of death. The only reason any of us are saved is that there has to come some moment in our lives where we realize our ways are wrong and we need to turn to God. The level of sin doesn't matter in the sense it is a matter of confessing our way of living is wrong and God's way of living is right.
  - b) A lot of people ask, "What about the mass murderer who turns to God". That person should still be punished in this lifetime and I am in favor of the death penalty. At the same time, that person does have the privilege of confessing that sin to God. If God is perfect, He can "perfectly forgive" all our sins, no matter how bad they are!
  - c) I've heard some people say, "Well, if that person is in heaven, I don't want to be there!" That is not a Christian way of thinking. If a person, no matter how bad they have lived, have sincerely turned to God, at that moment the "old person" is dead and God creates in them a new person. We will be with the "new person" in heaven, not the old.
    - i) Again, I do believe in justice and punishment in this lifetime. The issue is one's eternal salvation and confession of one's sins.
  - d) Verse 23 says, "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?"
    - i) The point is God wants all people to turn to Him, but at the same time, God will not violate our free will. If God wants us to freely choose Him, then He has to give us the free will to either choose Him or reject Him.
    - ii) God is not happy when people reject Him. That is the principal here. At the same time, God will not violate our free will to make that choice!
22. Verse 24: "But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die.
- a) Here the "opposite" principal is stated. If one lives part of their life for God and then makes the decision to turn from that lifestyle, that person is no longer "saved".
  - b) Again, this is not about a person who seeks God all of their lives and then messes up. That is an issue of confession. This is about a person who at one point in their life seeks God and now "they no longer care about God" and it becomes evident by their lifestyle.
  - c) The New Testament also makes clear that only God knows who is saved and who is not. That is what Jesus meant by "Do not judge". (Matthew 7:1) At the same time we are to judge people's behavior and God gives Christians the right to choose who we "fellowship" with in church. In other words, we are to judge behavior for the purposes of association. Only God knows who in the end will and will not be saved.
  - d) Do these verses argue that one can lose their salvation? That is a long running debate in Christianity. Some argue that type of person was never saved in the first place and others argue one can lose their salvation. I believe God knows all things and I don't have to worry about that issue! Personally, I believe we should primarily be concerned about working out our own salvation (confession of sin) than to worry about this classic debate!
23. Verse 25: "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? <sup>26</sup> If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. <sup>27</sup> But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. <sup>28</sup> Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. <sup>29</sup> Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?"

- a) These verses lead us back to where the chapter started. The Israelites believed they were suffering due to the sins of their parents and "forefathers".
  - b) God answers that question by saying in effect that "He judges everyone individually".
    - i) That generation of Israelites are guilty and it is not the sins of their parents.
    - ii) In other words, people can't use their parents as an excuse for their behavior once they reach an age of accountability.
    - iii) I have met an amazing number of adults who still blame others for the way they have turned out in life as opposed to taking accountability for their actions! Do people suffer due to the actions of others! Of course. That is no excuse for us to act the same way as non-believers and that is the principal being taught here.
  - c) These verses summarize the principal of this chapter, in that if one turns to God with their life, no matter what they have done in the past, they will live forever. At the same time, if one leads a sinful life or one turns from a "good life", one suffers forever!
  - d) The paragraph ends with God asking, "Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel?" God is stating that His way is the only fair way to judge people's lives. God is also stated that the Israel's way of thinking is wrong in that people were blaming their parents for their lives.
24. Verse 30: "Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. <sup>31</sup> Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup> For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!
- a) This chapter ends with a plea from God to turn from one's wicked ways. It is God saying again in effect, "I don't have any pleasure in punishing you, either in this lifetime or for eternity. Turn to My way of living and You won't have to suffer.
  - b) These verses also show how stubborn people's hearts become. Once we turn from God we "love" that lifestyle so much, we refuse to turn back. That is what is happening here.
  - c) Verse 30 says something interesting: "I will judge you, each one according to his ways".
    - i) The idea is that God will judge us based on the sins we have committed. In other words, judgment is based on how we have lived our lives. Those who refuse to accept Jesus' payment for sin will be judged by their own lifestyle!
25. OK, I promised not to go to long this week, so let me wrap it up with this thought:
- a) OK John, I'm saved and I turned to God. How do I apply this to my life?
  - b) For starters, remember that all sins we have committed after we are saved are just a "confession" away from being forgiven. Further, God's standards for right and wrong have not changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Just because we are saved does not give us a license to sin and "then just ask for forgiveness". Our new life in Christ is all about turning from our sinful ways. Just God will forgive us, but we still will have to suffer for the consequences of sins in this lifetime!
  - c) This also ties to the "eagle" analogy of the previous chapter. God wants us to be loyal to him and not "other birds". ☺ The idea is God wants us to live a life pleasing to Him and being obedient to Him in all that we do. Enough said.
26. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, Help us to realize the sins that are still part of our lives and help us to confess them and turn from them. Help us to live a life pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to help others so that they may see that living for "You" not only leads to salvation, but is the way that You want all of us to live. Help us to be living examples so that people will see that God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked". We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.
- 27.