

The Visions of Ezekiel

Lesson 13

As the LORD was speaking through Ezekiel to the *rebellious house of Israel*, He had just given a message through a riddle and a parable. Now He will deliver a message through a proverb.

18. Ezekiel's Twentieth Assignment from the LORD

a) Proverb of the Grapes and Teeth

Eze 18:1 Then **the word of the LORD came to me**, saying, **Eze 18:2** "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'?"

A proverb is a short pithy saying that is used often in general conversation. Some modern proverbs that you might recognize are as follows.

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.
Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone.

This proverb, "**The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge,**" was a common saying in Ezekiel's day and to the Israelites, it was generally thought to be true. What does it mean?

This proverb had already been repeated in Jerusalem about the same time as this vision by the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 31:29. The proverb actually poses an interesting question. "*How far do the sinful actions of the parents affect the lives of their children?*" Taking that a step further, "*Will the children be punished because of the sins of the parents?*" Parents most definitely pass on the sin nature to their children at birth. You do not have to teach a child to sin, he will do it instinctively! But, "*Are children punished for the sinful nature of their parents?*" Jeremiah was answering the same proverb in Jerusalem when he said in the next verse.

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

The answer from the LORD through Jeremiah was, "*It has nothing to do with your parents. If you eat the sour grapes, the problem is yours. You will be punished for your own sin and no one else's!*" What did the LORD want to say to the *rebellious house of Israel* with Ezekiel in his tent on the Chabar River? The LORD always has an answer.

b) Proclamation Concerning the Proverb
(1) Proverb Done

Eze 18:3 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

With this word the LORD settled the matter and brought an end to the proverb that was a false statement. "...**you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.**" The LORD had seen and heard the false proverb spread like a virus among His chosen nation and He intended to stop its use immediately. "**As I live...**" means the LORD was staking His life on ridding the proverb from the lying lips of this *rebellious house of Israel*. "**As I live ... !**" The LORD had always lived and could not die! Surely, He had the authority to end what He wanted to end. Why? He gives the reason in the next statement.

(2) The Soul Who Sins

Eze 18:4 "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.

"Behold" He said. Pay attention to this. *"Your soul and every soul belongs to Me! If you commit the sin, you will pay the penalty for that sin. Not your father, not your mother, not your son, not your daughter or anyone else in the world!"*

(a) The Righteous Man

Eze 18:5 "But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness, ^{Eze 18:6} 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— ^{Eze 18:7} 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, ^{Eze 18:8} 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, ^{Eze 18:9} *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.

After the LORD's declaration He presented three examples to ponder. First was the *righteous man*. This man loved the LORD, followed the Law, cared for the needy and treated his neighbors right. The most important point was his faithfulness to the LORD and Him alone!

(b) The Violent Son

Eze 18:10 "Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother ^{Eze 18:11} (~~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, ^{Eze 18:12} oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but lifts up his eyes to the idols *and* commits abomination, ^{Eze 18:13} 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.

Second was the *violent son*. Every point was in opposition to the way and love exemplified in the life of his father. The father would live eternally, the son would die eternally.

(c) The Just Grandson

Eze 18:14 "Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father's sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise. Eze 18:15 "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, Eze 18:16 or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery, but he gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing, Eze 18:17 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. Eze 18:18 "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. Eze 18:19 "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.

Then we come to the *just grandson*. He was a carbon copy of his grandfather. He would live eternally in spite of the example played out in front of him by his father.

(d) The Person Who Sins

Eze 18:20 "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.

The LORD had issued a dire message to those *elders of the house of Israel* sitting in the home of Ezekiel. He was not through. One more time He addressed the issue. The one who sinned would be the one who died for the sin. The sin of one generation would not be held against the next generation. The righteous man received the reward of being righteous, the wicked man would receive the reward of being wicked. One reward was eternal life, the other reward was eternal death.

(i) The LORD's Hope for the Wicked

Eze 18:21 "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. Eze 18:22 "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. Eze 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?"

As long as the breath of life remains in one's body, hope can abound that a wicked person will turn from his wicked way to live a righteous life with the LORD. The LORD said, **"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked...?"** The LORD's answer can be rightly assumed to be a resounding "NO!" How do we know this? It is because the LORD continued to say, **"... rather than that he should turn from his ways and live...."** It is the desire of the LORD that all would be righteous; nevertheless, He created each person with the ability to make

his own choice to turn from the wickedness and live in righteousness. We might glean from that statement the only way to obtain eternal life.

(ii) The LORD's Warning to the Righteous

Eze 18:24 "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.

And so we come to a quandary. *"If a righteous man chooses to become wicked -then he shall die eternally!"* How can that be? Can the holy man fall and perish everlasting? Notice the wording carefully. The LORD said the **"righteous man turns away from his righteousness."** He has not turned from the LORD's righteousness – rather his own! A world of difference exists between living in the righteousness of the LORD and living in self-righteousness. One is living under the shelter and watch care of the LORD. The other is living under the shelter and watch-care of self. One is living according to the will of the LORD. The other is living under the will of self. What you think is righteousness may not be what the LORD calls righteousness. Every generation through history has had this problem. A standard is set and expected. That standard is considered the right thing to do! And so we need an illustration from today's world to understand. Living in a marital type relationship without being married is a standard in this world that is considered the right thing to do. It is not. The LORD says it is not. The couple may think they are righteous in their living arrangement, but the LORD does not. They are living in self-righteousness, not true Godly righteousness. They will die in their sin eternally unless they repent. But what about all the good they have done in the world, all the lives they have changed as teachers, leaders, helpers, et al? All good and right deeds of man cannot wipe away the sin of self-righteousness for it is wickedness.

Now the problem is, many self-righteous people are Bible-thumping fanatics. They haul their Bibles around and quote the few verses they know completely out of context directed at topics that have absolutely nothing to do with each other. Most are Bible illiterate, but they have worn a place on the side of their ribs where their 1611 King James Version will fit nicely. They cannot tell you the true meaning of words in that Bible such as *barbarian* [speaker of a different language], *bowels* [compassionate feelings], *careful* [to be anxious], and *prevent* [to go before]. These are archaic words with definitions we would never expect today. But the fanatics will flip them off their tongues totally out of context. They think they are righteous! Their community thinks they are righteous. But that is not what God thinks.

(iii) The LORD's Question of Israel

Eze 18:25 "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?"

The self-righteous man will rear up against the LORD and defy His ways as wrong and intolerable. The unbelievable termination of the lives of babies in the womb is a classic example where the self-righteous community of humans say the LORD is wrong and we are right. We have a right over our bodies. Do you? Your body is a temporary casing to house your soul. Who does your soul belong to? The LORD! All souls are His as He said. *"It does not give Him pleasure for a soul to die eternally, but it will come about because of the self-righteous choice of the soul."*

(a) Sin Leads to Death

Eze 18:26 "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.

We must not mistake our earthly righteousness for heavenly righteousness. When a seemingly righteous man sneaks around in the dark alley of sin, all the good self-righteous, holier than thou words and deeds will not save his life.

(b) Righteousness Leads to Life

Eze 18:27 "Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. Eze

18:28 "Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Fake righteousness as explained in the previous verse will get you nowhere fast. However, true righteousness will get you somewhere even faster. All a wicked man must do to inherit eternal life is turn from that sin and live in true righteousness! It must be the LORD's righteousness that leads to life.

(iv) The LORD's Calling Out of Israel

Eze 18:29 "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?

Now the LORD points His finger right in the nose of the *house of Israel*. It was the one that sought its own self-righteous, idol worshiping, baby sacrificing righteousness. The LORD said it was all wrong, Israel said it was all right! All right it was not. The LORD called Israel out for its sin and Ezekiel was required to point that out to the men with him inside the walls of his home.

(v) The LORD's Call to Israel

Eze 18:30 "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. Eze

18:31 "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?

Israel had the same problem with sin that we have today. When we sin, it catches up with us, it gets in front of us, it lies before us and we do not even see it. What happens! It causes us to trip and fall, caught in our lies, caught in our theft, caught in our desires, our self-righteousness.

To all of that, the LORD gives Israel another chance, **"Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!"** How can we do that? Are we not taught that it is the LORD Who makes the new heart and the new spirit? Yes! However, when the LORD says' **"Repent and turn away from your transgressions," (Eze 18:30)** that action is a decision that you must make. He will not force you to make that decision; He will not make that decision for you. You must decide it is time for a new heart and a new spirit. You must decide that you are sick and tired of being sick and tired of being sick and tired of your sin. You must change your "conduct" and then He will remold your heart and spirit into what He wants it to be, but it all hinges on your choice.

(vi) The LORD's Desire for Israel

Eze 18:32 **"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."**

The remnant of the *house of Israel*, the saved of the Northern Kingdom, removed from that wicked country for safety and posterity, the righteous that is, had birthed wicked offspring. Unless the offspring took the counsel of the LORD seriously, repented and turned from their wicked conduct, they would die eternally because of their sins. Not so for their parents. They died to eternal life with the LORD. The generation sitting in front of Ezekiel had a decision to make. It should have been easy to do but it caused great consternation in their souls because they had it in their minds that they were already righteous.

c) Preparation for a Lamentation

Eze 19:1 **"As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel**

First there was the riddle, then the parable followed by a proverb. Now we come to the lamentation. A **"lamentation"** is an expression of grief, sorrow, or weeping. It is usually in some form of poetry. We might best think of it as a dirge or a funeral song. This one was to be for the **"princes of Israel."** The lamentation was a song of dread for two past kings of Israel.

(1) Israel's Mother and Her Cubs

Eze 19:2 **and say, 'What was your mother? A lioness among lions! She lay down among young lions, She reared her cubs.**

The picture in this lamentation represents the remnant of the *Nation of Israel*, the Southern Kingdom, as a mother lioness. She was a **"lioness among lions!"** She was surrounded by lions which represented the countries that surrounded Israel (Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Lebanon). The Southern Kingdom had cubs. These cubs were the kings of the kingdom, specifically, two in this lamentation. Both kings were well known to the men sitting in front of Ezekiel.

(a) The First Cub – A Lion

Eze 19:3 **'When she brought up one of her cubs, He became a lion, And he learned to tear his prey; He devoured men.** Eze 19:4 **'Then nations heard about him; He was captured in their pit, And they brought him with hooks To the land of Egypt.**

Her cub was the King Jehoahaz. He had become the king upon the accidental death of his father by the army of Pharaoh Necco. With the death of Josiah, Necco was in control of the Southern Kingdom. He placed Jehoahaz on the

throne as his servant king. His biological mother's name was *Hamutual*. After just 90 days of rebellious rule of the Southern Kingdom against the will of Necco, Necco removed Jehoahaz from the throne and literally put a hook in his nose to lead him with a leash to Egypt where he died in captivity (2 Kings 23:31-34 and Jeremiah 22:11-12).



Pharaoh Necho



King Jehoahaz

(b) The Second Cub – A Lion

Eze 19:5 'When she saw, as she waited, *That* her hope was lost, She took another of her cubs And made him a young lion. Eze 19:6 'And he walked about among the lions; He became a young lion, He learned to tear his prey; He devoured men. Eze 19:7 'He destroyed their fortified towers And laid waste their cities; And the land and its fullness were appalled Because of the sound of his roaring. Eze 19:8 'Then nations set against him On every side from *their* provinces, And they spread their net over him; He was captured in their pit. Eze 19:9 'They put him in a cage with hooks And brought him to the king of Babylon; They brought him in hunting nets So that his voice would be heard no more On the mountains of Israel.



*Nebuchadnezzar
Coin Rubbing*

Her second cub would naturally seem to be Jehoiakim who was placed on the throne by Necco and served for 11 years as king. But Jehoiakim was not a young lion by any means. After Nebuchadnezzar removed Jehoiakim from the throne, he placed Jehoiachin in charge. Jehoiachin was just eight years old when that happened. He was a young lion. He reigned as king for only 100 days and then he was taken to Babylon where he lived in prison for 37 years. He never returned to Israel.



Jehoiachin

(2) Israel's Mother Like a Vineyard

Eze 19:10 'Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard, Planted by the waters; It was fruitful and full of branches Because of abundant waters. Eze 19:11 'And it had strong branches *fit* for scepters of rulers, And its height was raised above the clouds So that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches. Eze 19:12 'But it was plucked up in fury; It was cast down to the ground; And the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong branch was torn off So that it withered; The fire consumed it.

The fate of the Southern Kingdom was set even though Nebuchadnezzar had placed Zedekiah on the throne for the last 11 years of its existence as a nation. The “east wind” in this lamentation was a reference to Nebuchadnezzar and his army from Babylon who would come to destroy the city and the kingdom. He would tear it apart, let it wither and burn it.

(3) Israel's Mother in the Dry Wilderness

Eze 19:13 'And now it is planted in the wilderness, In a dry and thirsty land. Eze 19:14 'And fire has gone out from *its* branch; It has consumed its shoots *and* fruit, So that there is not in it a strong branch, A scepter to rule.'" This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

The dirge of this lamentation ends with a despairing note. The Southern Kingdom was going to be left deserted in the grave of the dust of the land in which it had flourished for hundreds of years. No king to rule, no place to rule, nothing to rule. For that fact, its capital city of Jerusalem would suffer the worst damage of all. Fifty years would pass before it would be inhabited again by the remnants of the Jews. More years would pass before its walls would be rebuilt and its Temple would rise from the dust. In spite of this lamentation, death was coming to the capital and the kingdom in five years.

And with that, we come to the end of the second vision to Ezekiel.