

LESSON 12

May 23, 2021

Unit III: Courageous Prophets of Change Take Responsibility

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 147

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 18

PRINT PASSAGE: Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32

Key Verse—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. (Ezekiel 18:4, KJV)

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“Everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.” (Ezekiel 18:4, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Examine behavior in which we blame others as the cause.
- Commit to being responsible for your own behavior.
- Engage in responsible behavior that finds favor with God.

KEY TERMS

Live (verse 32)—Hebrew: *chayah* (khaw-yaw’): to be alive; let live.

Repent (verse 32)—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): turn away from; return; “turn” (KJV).

Righteous (verse 5)—Hebrew: *tsaddiq* (tsad-deek’): “just” (KJV); blameless.

Sins (verse 4)—Hebrew: *chata* (khaw-taw’): goes wrong; misses the mark; trespasses; “sinneth” (KJV).

INTRODUCTION

Children and adults alike love to play the “blame game.” Somehow it seems easier to blame someone else for personal flaws and failures rather than to take responsibility for them ourselves. Psychologists have identified at least three degrees of blaming: (1) blaming something or someone else for one’s outcomes and consequences; (2) blaming oneself for everything; (3) and blaming God or fate for what happens. For many people, playing the blame game is a way of protecting one’s ego without accepting responsibility for personal inadequacies or weaknesses. The practice is certainly not new; it can be traced back to the Garden of Eden. It began with Adam and Eve, who both blamed someone or something else for failing to obey God’s command. The blame game is more of a sin problem than a psychological malfunction. The sin nature refuses to see the fault in itself. A pattern of blaming can be seen throughout the Old Testament. Fresh from slavery, the Israelites blamed Moses for their suffering in the wilderness. The exiles during Ezekiel’s ministry and those still left within war-ravaged Jerusalem laid the fault of their exile on their fathers’ sins rather than on their own spiritual compromise. They not only refused to repent but also refused to even see or acknowledge any unrighteousness in themselves. In their blind arrogance, they dared to accuse God of injustice toward them. Ezekiel addressed this attitude by explaining that each individual is responsible for his or her own conduct before Him.

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Ezekiel is the undisputed author of the book that bears his name. During the second Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was among thousands of young men who were carried off from Judah to Babylon when King Jehoiachin surrendered. Ezekiel was being trained for the priesthood in Judah, but during the dark days of exile in Babylon, God called Ezekiel to be a prophet. He was a contemporary of an older Jeremiah and of Daniel's, who was among the first group of captives to be deported to Babylon. Ezekiel's ministry was addressed to the exiles who were still reeling from the pain of a crushing national defeat to a foreign enemy. False prophets had deceived them with the empty promise of a speedy return to their homeland. Ezekiel was commissioned by God to deliver a message of personal obedience and accountability to God, the inevitable fall of Jerusalem, and that there was no hope for an immediate return. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's prophecies related to the future restoration of Israel to its homeland and in the messianic kingdom. During his ministry to the exiles in Babylon, the prophet also addressed the misinterpretation of a well-known proverb that placed the blame for the exiles' suffering on the sins of their parents.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Personal Accountability

(Ezekiel 18:1-4)

KJV

THE WORD of the LORD came unto me again, saying,

2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

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

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.

NIV

THE WORD of the LORD came to me:

2 "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: 'The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?"

3 "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel.

4 "For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who *sins* is the one who will die."

Our view of God dictates our behavior and willingness to take responsibility for our own actions. Ezekiel 18 presents a glimpse of a people with a wrong view of God. Rather than accepting the truth concerning their own sin, they were determined to excuse themselves from personal accountability. In doing so, they were flatly rejecting God's sovereign right to judge and punish them. Ezekiel had previously delivered three messages condemning the nation for its sin (chapters 15–17). Chapter 18 records the prophet's emphasis on the people's guilt. He responded to a popular and well-known proverb regarding sour grapes, which suggested that their suffering was a direct result of their parents' sins and not their own (verses 1-2). They were really blaming God for punishing them unjustly. The proverb may have been derived from God's words in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:5), Exodus 34:6-7, and Deuteronomy 5:9, but its focus was directed at the serious, longlasting effects of sin. God rejected their blame-game mentality and declared that all lives were His, both the father's and the son's. Those choosing to sin were

personally accountable to Him and would die in their sins (verses 3-4). One's environment and upbringing, good or bad, does not remove his or her personal accountability for sin. We cannot blame others for our own choice to sin when we are aware of what God's Word teaches. The church must intentionally teach this truth, confront sin, and lovingly embrace those who acknowledge their sin and repent.

What Do You Think?

How does knowing that God holds you accountable for your own sin affect your attitude regarding obeying the Scriptures?

Personal Integrity

(Ezekiel 18:5-9)

KJV

5 But if a man be *just*, and do that which is lawful and right,
6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,
7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;
8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,
9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.

NIV

5 "Suppose there is a *righteous* man who does what is just and right.
6 "He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife or have sexual relations with a woman during her period.
7 "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.
8 "He does not lend to them at interest or take a profit from them. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between two parties.
9 "He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD."

The principle of personal accountability for sin is illustrated by three examples in Ezekiel 18:5-20: a righteous man doing right (verses 5-9); a wicked son of a righteous father (verses 10-13); and a righteous son of a wicked father (verses 14-18). Ezekiel describes each individual's actions and God's response to them. The first case describes the actions of a righteous man who followed God with all his heart (verse 5). This hypothetical man was not guilty of the rampant idolatry being practiced (verse 6a); he faithfully maintained sexual purity (verse 6b), sought to help rather than oppress others, put God's law above financial gain (verse 7), and was compassionate and faithful in his dealings with others (verse 8). God's conclusion was that this man would be spared from judgment and would not suffer because of the sins of others (verse 9). For believers today, this profile of a righteous man is synonymous to visible spirituality. Visible spirituality is doctrine in

practice—that is, living out what we know and believe about God’s Word. God still looks for spiritual and moral integrity in the lives of every believer because it is the visible evidence of a transformed life and a powerful witness to the unsaved.

What Do You Think?

Do you think the church places adequate emphasis on preaching and teaching the necessity of holy living? Explain briefly.

Personal Responsibility

(Ezekiel 18:30-32)

KJV

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

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?

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

NIV

30 “Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.

31 “Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel?

32 “For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. *Repent and live!*”

The principle of individual responsibility for sin was explained and proved by Ezekiel through a variety of hypothetical case studies (see verses 5-29). The conclusion was that the people of each generation are responsible to God for their personal response to His commandments. Ezekiel concluded His argument with this summary—a just God must judge each person for his own life (verse 30a). The solution for Israel was to repent and turn from their transgressions to avoid His righteous judgment (verse 30b). This required spiritual renewal—a new heart and a new spirit (verse 31). Genuine repentance occurs from the inside out in the lives of those who change their rebellious attitude toward God. This was an individual call to repentance because the life or death of the people depended on their individual responses to God’s Word. God’s desire was that they would choose life by repenting, because He took no pleasure in the death of anyone who refused to turn from their sin (verse 32). God has not changed; He still calls every true believer to repent and turn to Him. The message of individual accountability is still relevant today. Our nation is suffering because of the far-reaching effects of sin. The church must take a stand for righteousness that challenges both the believer and the unsaved with the principle of individual accountability for sin. The “blame game” does not work with God.

What Do You Think?

Why must the need for personal spiritual transformation be taught?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Playing the blame game is dangerous when it comes to one's spiritual life. God requires personal holiness from every believer that is independent of anyone else's actions. He holds every living soul personally responsible for his or her own sin. God is holy and sin is a serious matter to Him. Those who claim or desire a relationship with Him must commit to holy living and present themselves daily to Him for continual spiritual transformation into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR LIFE

This week, commit to taking a personal inventory of your personal relationship with the Lord. We are quick to dismiss our sin as insignificant or to make excuses for it, but as God observes your behavior and attitude, what do you think He sees? Identify an area of disobedience, own it, confess it, and seek His help through the Holy Spirit to overcome it.

YOUR WORLD!

A quick review of the leading news headlines, popular song lyrics, or storyline of top television shows and movies will remind you that our culture does not take God seriously. As a nation, we overlook, tolerate, and excuse sin at almost every level of society. Those who are confronted for their immorality and disobedience to God flip the conversation and blame anything and everyone but themselves. The easy tolerance of sin makes matters worse, because society's moral standards have drifted so far from God's Word that many people seem to be completely ignorant of what is right. Across thousands of years, God's Word to His people in captivity remains relevant today; your response to God will determine your destiny.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, we confess and take responsibility for our sin. Forgive us and cleanse our hearts and minds of the tendency to disobey Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson will reveal a preacher and a people who were offered a second chance to get right with God. Read Jonah 3 in preparation for the study.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 24-30, 2021)

Jonah: Fiery Harbinger of Doom

MONDAY, May 24	"Jonah's Experience Foreshadows Christ's"	(Matthew 12:38-42)
TUESDAY, May 25	"Nineveh's Repentance; A Lasting Message"	(Luke 11:29-32)
WEDNESDAY, May 26	"Jonah Turns Away from God's Call"	(Jonah 1:1-12)
THURSDAY, May 27	"Sailors Make Vows to the Lord"	(Jonah 1:13-16)
FRIDAY, May 28	"Jonah Resents God's Grace Toward Others"	(Jonah 4:1-5)
SATURDAY, May 29	"God's Compassion Overrides Jonah's Personal Comfort"	(Jonah 4:6-11)
SUNDAY, May 30:	"God's Mercy Prevails"	(Jonah 3)