

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).

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher’s Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week’s student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!”).
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

It is easy to blame our background or upbringing for the misfortunes we face. What is the role of personal responsibility? Ezekiel warns that each person will answer to God for their own behavior and that favor with God only comes through repentance and obedience.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

There is a strong human tendency to blame others rather than accepting responsibility for one’s own actions. Beginning with Adam and Eve, the history of God’s people and His dealings with them reveals an inclination to “pass the buck” to others rather than take personal responsibility for their own sin. The exiles in Babylon to whom Ezekiel ministered attempted to play the blame game

with God. At the root of this tendency is an ungodly pride that causes people to see themselves as more righteous or worthy than the one(s) they blame for their misfortune. In their minds, someone is more deserving than they are of the guilt or consequence related to their situation. The exiles blamed their predicament on their ancestors, rejecting the notion that God had fairly judged them as unrighteous and that their own disobedience had landed them in captivity.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

Ezekiel was one of several prophets who ministered to God's people during and after their foreign exile. God gave the prophet a word for His broken, distraught people. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet. He was taken captive following Nebuchadnezzar's second siege of the city of Jerusalem along with King Jehoiachin and a group of at least ten thousand other Jews. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah's and Daniel's. His message to the exiles in Babylon included refuting the claim of false prophets who assured the exiles that they would return to Judah shortly. For a period of about nine years, Ezekiel warned them that Jerusalem would fall, and their exile would be prolonged. After receiving the news that the city had fallen, Ezekiel's prophecies were focused on Israel's consolation and future restoration to their homeland. As the prophet explained the reason for God's judgment of the nation, he had to refute the exiles' adamant claim that they did not deserve this punishment. God had prepared Ezekiel for this task and told him the exiles were as rebellious as those who remained in Jerusalem and were blind to their own sins. Using a well-known proverb, the exiles excused themselves and claimed that God could not justly blame them for their parents' sins. Claiming to be more righteous than their ancestors and too righteous for God's judgment, the exiles became guilty of prideful self-deception. They blamed anyone but themselves for their situation—the ancestors and even God.

OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the items below.)

1. Why does God hold each individual accountable for his or her own sins?
2. What moral qualities does God require from His people?
3. Does "he is righteous and will surely live" refer to physical life, spiritual life, or both?
4. What is the danger of refusing to accept responsibility for your own actions?

INSIGHTS

Many people go through life blaming every misfortune or mishap in their lives on something or someone else—the devil, the weather, other people, bad luck, or God. At the other extreme are those who blame themselves for everything. In the Garden of Eden, when called to account for their sin, Adam blamed God for giving him Eve, while Eve blamed the serpent. Centuries later, their descendants were still playing the blame game. As Moses led Israel through the wilderness, they blamed him for the inconveniences of life in the wilderness, while remaining blind to their own rebellion against God and lack of faith. This same attitude followed Israel throughout their years in the Promised Land to the years of Babylonian exile. Today, people blame their sinful behavior on genetic makeup, the conditions of their environment, their upbringing, the failures or shortcomings of the church, and the flawed influence of spiritual leaders and church members. An old saying rings true: "Every tub must sit on its own bottom." Despite the strong human tendency to point a blaming finger in every direction but the right one, God has always judged His people based on their own individual faith and conduct.

EXPLORATION

Use the focus of this lesson to help the students internalize the principle of personal accountability for their own behavior. Discuss various reasons why it is easier to blame others rather than admitting personal failures and flaws. Invite the students to consider the burden that the “blame game” places on the local church. God does call believers to live with integrity so that others will be blessed by the light of their witness and glorify God. Allow the class to discuss whether it is biblical to blame the poor witness of worldly Christians for their spiritual shortcomings. Challenge the students to be sure that their failure to live with moral and spiritual integrity does not become a reason for immature Christians, youth, or unchurched persons to blame the church. Encourage the class to practice honest self-examination and repentance as keys to avoiding the blame game in their own lives.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on 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.”

Prior to his message on individual accountability, Ezekiel had delivered three parables focused on the conviction of the nation for her sin in chapters 15– 17. Apparently, the proverb that God questioned had been well-circulated and widely embraced among the exiles (verse 1). The prophet Jeremiah, Ezekiel’s contemporary, had quoted the same proverb (see Jeremiah 31:29-30). The proverb asserted that the children were suffering because of the sins of their parents, rather than because of their own sins (verse 2). The exiles, therefore, believed that God was punishing them unjustly. Through Ezekiel, God refuted the false proverb. The proverb may have originated from an interpretation of God’s words in Exodus 20:5, Exodus 34:6-7, and Deuteronomy 5 concerning the sin of one’s parents. The fall of Judah, however, resulted from the collective sins of God’s people across the generations. Those who landed in captivity, however, were no more innocent or righteous than their ancestors. God does not punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty. Those who quoted the proverb dared to deny their own guilt by blaming others for their suffering. God forbid the continued use of this proverb by declaring that every individual is personally accountable to Him by divine ownership (verses 3-4). Every guilty person will receive just

punishment for their own sins. This principle should serve as a wakeup call for us to personally examine our own lives as believers, identify our own sins, take ownership of them, and repent and live right before Him every day.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

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

- **Young Adult Questions:**

Why do we blame others for the negative outcomes of our own inappropriate choices? What is the risk of playing the “blame game” in families? In government leadership? In the church?

Commentary on 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.”

Ezekiel built the case for individual accountability by presenting three hypothetical scenarios: a righteous man doing right (verses 5-9); the wicked son of a righteous father (verses 10-13); and a righteous son of a wicked father (verses 14-18). The first scenario presents the profile of a righteous man who observed God's law with all his heart. His profile is a list of moral qualities that God required by the Law. This man was not guilty of taking part in sacrificial meals offered to idols nor of praying to them (verse 6a). Additionally, this righteous man maintained a right relationship with his fellow Israelites. Particularly, he was not guilty of adultery or of violating other laws concerning purification and sexual activity (verse 6b). This righteous man was also honest in his financial dealings, was compassionate, and treated others equitably according to the Law. He did not lend money with high interest rates or hold any article taken as a pledge from

them (verses 7-8). Because this man demonstrated moral purity and genuine compassion and justice toward others, God declared that he would not suffer for the sins of others (verse 9). This declaration must be kept in the context in which it is given. Everyone will endure suffering and inconvenience because of the realities of life in a fallen world, but none of us will be specifically held accountable for anyone's sins but our own. Judah had sinned against God for generations. Over time, Judah fell deeper into immorality and idolatry. God sent prophets to call the nation to repent, but when sin continued, God eventually allowed the nation to reap the consequences of spiritual rebellion. There is no substitute for obedience to God.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

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

- **Young Adult Question:**

Discuss the unbiblical practice of predatory lending—extending loans to others at an unreasonably high interest rate and/or attaching some harsh stipulation to the payback.

Commentary on 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!*”

Ezekiel concluded the teaching on individual accountability by calling the exiles to take responsibility for personal sin. Because “every way of a man is right in his own eyes” (Proverbs 21:2), the exiles and those still in Jerusalem dared to blame God for punishing them unjustly. God clarified that He would judge each individual's conduct before Him (verse 30a). At the same time, God offered repentance as an avenue of escape from judgment (verse 30b). The call to repentance involved turning away from personal transgressions and embracing spiritual renewal (verse 31). This would result in a new heart and a new spirit. Each person had to repent and take responsibility for his or her own sins. God's desire is for every person to enjoy a righteous relationship with Him (verse 32) by simply choosing to repent and live. God has not changed; the same choice is still on

the table. Will you repent and live, or waste your time trying to blame someone else for your missing the mark of God's holiness?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**

Why must the need for personal spiritual transformation be taught?

- **Young Adult Question:**

Explain the hope of restoration and mercy that God holds out to all those who have lost their way.

LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book**

(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)

—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.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)

—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

- **Refer to Young Adult Book**

(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)

—Sin and its temptations are all around us. Yet, when we sin, we are the first to point a finger and scream "It wasn't my fault!" Do you feel encouraged to take responsibility for your actions and thoughts, and to confess and repent? Where there is genuine repentance and a sincere effort to correct the wrong, God will forgive.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)

—Even when you do not realize it, someone is always watching your life and taking note of your behavior and Christian witness in the world. When you are deliberate about engaging in responsible behavior, you not only find favor with God but also draw others to Jesus.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, May 30, 2021, is "Changing for the Better." The Devotional Reading is Jonah 2, the Background Scripture is Jonah 3, and the Printed Text is Jonah 3:1-10.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we thank You for Your grace and patience toward us. Forgive us for falling short of Your glory, and thank You for the opportunity to repent and find forgiveness and restoration. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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)