

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 18:1-32

Topic

The Lord tells the sixth century Jews that they are wrong in blaming their fathers for their predicament and should instead take personal responsibility.

Title

“The Daddy Made Me Do It”

It’s just about time for “Don’t Blame Me” bumper stickers.

It doesn’t matter whether things improve or worsen. There’s a strange sense of catharsis in declaring that despite your candidate’s loss, you remain unwavering.

“Don’t Blame Me I Voted For Harris” stickers are available now for \$5.95 on amazon.

The 6th century Jews had a “don’t blame me” proverb. It’s quoted here, in verse two, and in the prophecies of Jeremiah. ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge.’

It was a protest proverb. The generation of Jews in Judah were soon to be overpowered by the Babylonian empire. They put the blame on their parents.

The LORD stepped in, saying, “You shall no longer use this proverb in Israel” (v3). The LORD holds each person responsible for the way they live their life.

Human beings have been passing the fig ever since Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. God held all three responsible.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Accept Your Responsibility & Walk Righteously**, and **#2 Admit Your Responsibility And Repent For Walking Unrighteously**.

#1 Accept Your Responsibility & Walk Righteously (v1-24)

We must address an important question: Do the terms righteousness, unrighteousness, life, and death in this chapter pertain to eternal life, or do they focus on our earthly, temporal existence?

- We immediately think of eternal life at any mention of righteousness. We can't say enough about the Lord declaring us righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ.
- A Jew reading this would immediately think of righteousness as the practical, daily keeping of God's Law.

These verses, this chapter, describes how Israel was expected to live on Earth.

In His covenants with Israel, the LORD promised to physically & materially bless the Israelites for obedience, but punish them for disobedience:

- Blessings for obedience included material prosperity, fruitful harvests, protection from enemies, and health.¹
- Penalties for disobedience included famine, defeat by enemies, disease, and exile from the Land.²

The Church is nowhere promised physical & material blessings while in our corruptible bodies.

In fact, the apostle Paul makes it clear in Ephesians that we are promised **spiritual** blessings in **heavenly** places.

Ezk 18:1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,

Ezk 18:2 "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'?"

¹ Deuteronomy 28:1-14

² Deuteronomy 28:15-68

Cultural proverbs do not need to make sense, they only need to convey a singular idea. The Jews in Judah were facing a third incursion from King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. They blamed their predicament on the decisions of their parents.

Ezk 18:3 "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.

The LORD interrupts and says, "No, nope, no way, absolutely not, not a chance, under no circumstances, never in a million years!"

Ezk 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 shall die.

The Titanic sank and 1,514 souls were lost. Maritime and aviation disasters use the word 'souls' to be sure everyone is counted, e.g., passengers, crew, etc. The LORD uses 'souls' in that same way here. It means people; it means everyone.

From here all the way through verse nineteen the LORD repeats the works of righteousness and the works of unrighteousness that reveal whether a person is obeying or disobeying God's Law.

Characteristics of the righteous souls include:

- Doing what is lawful and right.
- Not eating on the mountains. (This is referring to attending feasts to pagan gods of nature).
- Not lifting up eyes to the idols of the house of Israel.
- Not defiling your neighbor's wife.
- Not approaching a woman during her impurity.
- Not oppressing anyone, but restoring to the debtor his pledge.
- Robbing no one by violence, but giving bread to the hungry and covering the naked with clothing.
- Not exacting usury nor taking any increase.
- Withdrawing your hand from iniquity and executing true judgment between man and man.
- Walking in God's statutes and keeping His judgments faithfully.

Characteristics of the unrighteous person include:

- Eating on the mountains.

- Defiling your neighbor's wife.
- Oppressing the poor and needy.
- Robbing by violence.
- Not restoring the pledge.
- Lifting your eyes to the idols.
- Committing abomination.
- Exacting usury and taking increase.

The LORD illustrates using the example of a father, his son, and the grandson.

1. God introduces the obedient father (v5-9). His daily walk and work are righteous, resulting in physical and material blessings.
2. His son, however, engages in sin and will face consequences for his own actions, regardless of his father's righteousness (v10-13).
3. The wicked son's son observes his father's sins but chooses righteousness and obedience to God's Law.

The argument ends where it began. Each individual is accountable for their own actions; righteousness leads to life/blessing while wickedness leads to death/punishment (v14-19).

There is a near-perfect example. Less than 150 years earlier, Judah experienced a succession of kings:

1. King Hezekiah was obedient, walking in righteousness.
2. His son was Manasseh, Israel's worst king.
3. Manasseh fathered Josiah. He was a great & godly king

This succession of kings serves as a clear refutation of the proverb about sour grapes, demonstrating that each individual is accountable for their own actions.

Ezk 18:20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

Jim Gaffigan usually does a bit in his stand-up comedy where he acknowledges that the audience is probably wondering how many jokes he has on a certain topic. This chapter is more tragedy than comedy, but at some point, we start to wonder how many times God is going to say pretty much the same thing. You are responsible for your own deeds and decisions.

Ezk 18:21 "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Ezk 18:22 None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.

If someone makes a mistake, we say he needs to "own" it. If the "wicked" unrighteous person **owns** his or her sin, they repent and are restored to being blessed by God.

One eye-opening realization is that God holds "all souls" on Earth responsible to obey His Law.

Christians are adept at pointing out that no one can perfectly keep God's Law. We use it to evangelize because God's Law condemns us as sinners in need of a Savior. Is God being unfair? Is He asking us to do what we cannot do?

Jesus emphatically said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18).

Heaven & Earth won't "pass away" until *after* Jesus' Second Coming, and *after* the one-thousand year Kingdom of God on Earth. We are going to be surprised later in the Book of Ezekiel to learn that human beings will be offering sacrifices in the Millennial Temple.

Jesus equated anger with murder in the heart (Matthew 5:21-22). This reveals our sinful nature and the impossibility of fully keeping God's Law, highlighting our need for a new heart, as the human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

God's Law reveals our sinfulness, showing that we must repent and believe to be saved, as we cannot keep the Law to secure salvation. Yet, sitting here now, we trust others to obey the law and do not expect to be murdered.

For God to hold us personally responsible for our actions, we **must** possess free will. As A.W. Tozer stated, *"God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it."*

If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so."

#2 Admit Your Responsibility & Repent For Walking Unrighteously (v23-32)

The Jews were attacking God's character as someone who takes pleasure in treating people unfairly. Truth is, God treats everyone equally, and is constantly seeking to draw all men to Himself so they might be saved.

- Verse twenty-three: "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"
- Verse thirty-two: "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

Ezk 18:24 "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

The main takeaway here: The righteous man who sins knew the possible consequences and did it anyway.

The consequences of your parents decisions and deeds certainly do affect your life. Some of us has a better upbringing than did others. But you are not determined by it. **You choose.**

Ezk 18:25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"

Ezk 18:26 When a righteous *man* turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies.

Ezk 18:27 Again, when a wicked *man* turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive.

Ezk 18:28 Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezk 18:29 Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?"

If parents *are* to blame for the decisions and deeds of their children, then God **is** unfair. He he would be holding the sons responsible for things they could not do.

Ezk 18:30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.

Ezk 18:31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?

Ezk 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

Ezekiel looks to Israel's future, echoing God's promise through Jeremiah of a New Covenant: His Law written on hearts, forgiveness, and sins remembered no more.

Jesus revealed the New Covenant at the Last Supper, saying, "This cup... is the New Covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20), signifying His sacrifice would establish it.

Israel's rejection of Jesus delayed their full participation in the New Covenant. In the mean time the Church enjoys partial participation through the Holy Spirit's indwelling. God has not forsaken Israel; all Israel will be saved at the end of the Great Tribulation.

There's one more thing I want to draw from this incredible text.

I am hoping it will be a word of encouragement to many who hear it. For sure you are going to want to highlight it and save it as a favorite.

The righteous father has an unrighteous son; and the unrighteous son has a righteous son.

It is not a hypothetical. It was acted out in the succession of Judah's Kings.

Many believers endure the deep sorrow of having a prodigal son or daughter.

Part of the heartache is the inevitable, incessant blaming of yourself. You become inconsolable.

Jesus says to you, "The father [shall not] bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

We wait in hope that our prodigals would turn & return.