

The Prophets & Kings

From Rehoboam To Zedekiah

Book 1

A Daily Devotional Study Guide

Week 63

“It Is Your Choice”

Study: Ezekiel 18:1-9

Reading: Jeremiah 31:27-30, Revelation 20:11-15

Memory: Psalm 100:5

Over the years I have played in many sporting events and watched many more on television. There have been a handful of times where the referees made a very bad call near the end of a game that played a role in who won and lost the game. It is very easy for me to get frustrated at this and blame the referee for my team losing, but I try to remind myself that the one call wasn't what won and lost the game. There were many other plays throughout the game that helped determine the win or the loss. In most cases, if my team would have played better throughout the game, that bad call at the end wouldn't mean anything because we would have been up by many more points.

Today, we are going to see how blaming others for our problems is nothing new. The Israelites did this and it is very easy for us to still do today.

What Does the Bible Say?

The Hebrew Word for “you” mentioned in verse 1 is in the plural form indicating that this message was not directed at Ezekiel, but towards the land of Israel. The people had been repeating a common proverb about eating sour grapes. When a sour grape was eaten it would cause a person to cringe because of the taste, but this proverb described how the children were the ones who were suffering for their father's sins. Basically, they were blaming their problems on their parents rather than facing the reality that they were the ones who were causing their own problems. God declared that He did not want this proverb spoken again in Israel since each generation was responsible for their own actions. Just as those who had gone before them faced the consequences for their sins, so the current generation was facing the consequences for their current sin. Those who were choosing to live in sin would die because of it (vs 1-4).

On the other hand, if a man chose to do what was just and right he would live. The picture of life and death probably had more to do with

abundance and blessing than actual physical life, though they do often go hand in hand. The idea of righteousness was not some abstract idea that was hard to define because God spelled out what it looked like to live in righteousness. The first thing that was mentioned was a reference to the idolatry that would take place at the high places in the land. The people were to have nothing to do with the idol worship that was practiced by the pagan nations around them. Another act of unrighteousness had to do with sexual acts outside of marriage. Intercourse during a menstrual period was also a sexual act that was forbidden by the Old Testament law (vs 5-7).

Included in the list of unrighteous acts was the oppression of anyone, specifically here is the idea of a creditor oppressing the poor who owed them debts. They were to be fair and just in their business dealings. This would also include not stealing from others and giving to the poor and needy, making sure that they would not go hungry or unclothed. They were not to charge interest to fellow Israelites according to Deuteronomy 23:19-20, but were to loan money in order to help others out. All of this was about living with love, justice and fairness to others around them (vs 8).

Ultimately they were to focus on the laws that God had given them and faithfully live as God prescribed the Israelites to live. This was the righteous living that would bring about abundant life and keep the people from destruction (vs 9).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Though you as a New Testament believer are no longer required to follow the Old Testament law, the principal of living a righteous life still applies to you today. Most of the instructions for righteous living given here are repeated in the New Testament as great importance is placed on loving others and treating others justly. When you live as God desires the result will be an abundant life. You must also understand that you alone are responsible for your actions. No matter how good or bad your parents may have been, you have the choice whether you will live righteous each and every day. It has become very common for people to excuse themselves and their sin by declaring that is how they were raised. There are many people who do have it harder because of the environment they were raised in, but everyone still has a choice for how they choose to live each day.

What proverb did the Israelites keep repeating (vs 1-2)?

What does the fact that they repeated this indicate (vs 2)?

What were they basically saying by declaring this proverb (vs 2)?

How have you found yourself or seen others declaring something similar?

What did God say about this proverb?

Why do you think God didn't want this proverb to be used?

What do you think the beginning of verse 4 means?

What was God emphasizing in verse 4?

Why do you think it is so important to realize that you are accountable for your actions?

What happens to those who choose to live in sin (vs 4)? What do you think this means?

What does verse 5 contrast?

What unrighteous acts were mentioned in verse 6?

How do you think you can act this way in today's society?

How do you think you can oppress someone else today (vs 7)?

Sum up the righteous acts listed in verse 7.

Why do you think God didn't want the Israelites to charge interest for the money they lent to each others (vs 8)?

What did God want His children to live (vs 9)?

What would be the result for living in righteousness?

“Sins Are Forgiven”

Study: Ezekiel 18:10-23

Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-8, 2 Peter 3:1-13

Memory: Psalm 100:5

One of the things that drove me nuts as a sports player is when the whole team had to suffer for the actions of one teammate. Yes, there were times where we as teammates could have stood up to this person and helped them make better choices, but there were other times where we tried our best, but the actions of one player caused us to have to do extra sprints or miss out on fun activities. Because of my dislike for this type of punishment, I tried my best when I coached to make the person responsible for the actions suffer for their choice and tried not to punish the whole team for the actions of a few.

Today, we are going to read how God is merciful and will not punish a child for the actions of their father, nor will He punish a father for the actions of his son.

What Does the Bible Say?

Just as a son would not be punished for the sins of His father, the father will not be punished for the sins of his son. Ezekiel presented a scenario where a son was a violent murderer even though the father had not been involved in that same type of wickedness. In addition to murder, this son was also guilty of adultery, idolatry, oppression, robbery and abomination. Simply put, this son did everything that God told His children not to do. This son would be the one who faced the punishment for his actions. It wasn't the father who would be punished (vs 10-13).

Ezekiel continued this illustration by describing how this wicked son also had a son, but his son realized how wicked his father was and chose not to continue in those wicked ways. He acted the opposite of his father and chose to live in righteousness. The result would be that this man would live and not have to suffer for the sins of his father. Yes, his father would still be punished, even though his son was righteous (vs 14-18).

Apparently this concept was foreign to some of the thinking of the Israelites because Ezekiel knew that many were thinking that the sons would have to suffer for the sins of the father. Yes, there are portions of

the Old Testament where it does describe how the sins of the fathers greatly affected their children, but when it came to individual accountability, each generation had a choice to follow the rules of God and experience His blessing or not to follow and experience the pain that came with it. Once again, Ezekiel emphasized how each man would suffer or be rewarded for the way they lived (vs 19-20).

Next, Ezekiel revealed that a person doesn't have to be stuck in one type of lifestyle. If a person who had been rebellious against the laws of God realized the error of his way, he could turn back to God and would no longer face the punishment and death that was promised. His wicked ways would be forgiven and his righteousness is what would be remembered. This is because God did not desire to punish or kill the unrighteous person, just as God does not desire to condemn a person to eternal damnation. He wants to pour out His grace and mercy on those who turn back to Him.

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you realize the great hope that this passage gives for you and for all of those who have sinned? No, you will never be perfect in your human flesh and will fall short of God's glory, but those who strive for righteousness will experience the great freedom that forgiveness brings in this life and the great fulfillment found in the eternal hope of the life to come. Though this is Old Testament teaching, the New Testament reiterates the same idea of the forgiveness of God. Paul called himself the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15) and in 1 Corinthians 6:11 he described how many of the Corinthians had been great sinners, but were washed by the blood of Christ and declared righteous. The New Testament as well as the Old Testament reveals that sin does affect following generations, but that each generation is responsible for the way they live and will be judged by their own actions.

Suggestions for Prayer

* *Thank God for allowing you to face the consequences for your own choices.*

Thought for the day

What type of son did Ezekiel present (vs 10)?

What did Ezekiel make clear about the father (vs 11)?

What sins did this son commit (vs 11-13)?

Why do you think Ezekiel gave this list of sins?

What would be the consequences for this man's sins (vs 13)?

****As we talked about yesterday, this is not a reference to immediate death for sin, but probably a picture of consequences on this earth as well as eternal consequences after physical death.*

What do you think the phrase at the end of verse 13 means?

What scenario did Ezekiel present in verse 14?

What does this reveal about following in the way of your parents?

How are this son's actions summed up (vs 17)?

What will be the result of his righteousness?

What will happen to the father (vs 18)?

Why do you think Ezekiel emphasized this?

What would some people say (vs 19)?

Why do you think this was a common way of thinking?

Do you see this type of thinking in our society today? Explain.

What happens if a man turns from his wickedness (vs 21)?

“A Just God”

Study: Ezekiel 18:25-32

Reading: Galatians 6:1-16, Psalm 1:1-6

Memory: Psalm 100:5

A long time U.S. women's soccer star, Megan Rapinoe, tore her achilles tendon minutes into the last game of her soccer career. What she planned to be a glorious exit from the sport, did not go as planned. After the game, she declared “I'm not a religious person or anything and if there was a God, like, this is proof that there isn't.” Sadly, throughout her career she had been an outspoken advocate for gay rights and was a strong force in supporting many ideologies that were opposite of what the Bible declares to be right. What should have been an incident to help her see she needed to turn to God, appears to have actually caused more hardness in her heart towards Him,

Today, we will read how this type of thinking is not new, but is the same type of thinking the Israelites had about a just God.

What Does the Bible Say?

One of the complaints that the Israelites had against God was that they felt that He was not a just God. They didn't believe He was doing the right thing for them, but the truth was that it was the children of Israel who were not doing the right thing. God declared that a person would be judged for turning from righteousness and practicing injustice. In the same manner, if a person chose to turn from their wickedness and did what was right, he would be blessed for his deeds. Basically, God was going to reward them for their actions. Their actions determined the good or bad outcome and things could not be more just and fair than that (vs 25-29).

The result of rejecting the just actions of God would lead to His judgement upon them. Everyone would face the consequences for their own actions. Their sin would lead to great ruin unless they chose to repent and turn back to Him. God challenged them to “cast away” (ESV) their sins. This pictured a willful act and understanding that their sin was wrong and they needed to fling it far away from them. If they did this and allowed a new spirit and new heart to dwell in them, there would be

no reason for God to punish them. God was not a God who desired to hurt people and He found no pleasure in causing pain to His children. He wanted them to live and experience the abundant life that His blessings produced. The ultimate choice of what happened to the people was not going to be based on God, but based on their own action (vs 30-33).

How Does this Apply to Me?

It is very easy to blame God for things that He is not responsible for. Yes, He is a sovereign God who is in control of the whole universe, but He is not a God who simply plays us like pawns to accomplish some selfish plan. God is a God who does what is just and right. He has laid out His plans and His desires in His Word, and because He is a just and righteous God, He will always keep His Word. This means that your actions and choices will not be meaningless. Though in His grace and mercy God can still use wicked choices and decisions to accomplish His plans, ultimately the choice of what happens in your life is up to you. Yes, there are things you are not in control of, but Scripture is clear in the Old and New Testaments that you will face the consequences for your choices. Galatians 6:7-8 declares, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Though God will allow trials and difficulties to come into your life, He is and always will be a just God. What you do with those things will determine the outcome in your life on this earth and in the life to come. You can trust that if you are faithful to Him and choose to seek after righteousness in your life that He will bless you just as He promised.

Suggestions for Prayer

- * Thank God for rewarding your choice to follow Him.
- * Ask God to help you live a life that seeks after righteousness.
- * Praise God because He is a God of justice.

Thought for the day

What did the Israelites declare about what God was doing (vs 25)?

Why do you think they declared this?

How can you be tempted to declare the same thing (vs 25)?

What question did God ask in verse 25?

What point was He making with that question?

What will happen to person who starts out righteous, but chooses to turn away (vs 26)?

****As we have read for the last few days, it appears that the idea of death is not just a picture of earthly death, but is a reference to the punishment that God will bring in this life and in the life to come.*

What will happen to the person who recognizes their sin and turns to God (vs 27)?

What are some verses in the New Testament that describe this same idea?

Why would the people described in verses 27-28 choose to turn to God (vs 28)?

****They took time to evaluate and consider the consequence for their actions.*

What was emphasized again in verse 29?

What did God say He would do (vs 30)?

What did He call people to do (vs 30-31)?

What did God say He had no pleasure in (vs 32)?

What did God want men to do (vs 32)?

What can you learn about God from this?

“Ending in Ruins”

Study: Ezekiel 19:1-14

Reading: 1 Timothy 6:3-10, Revelation 2:1-7

Memory: Psalm 100:5

There was a television show called, “Mysteries of the Abandoned.” In this show, they would often explore the remnants of places that were once on the cutting edge of technology and luxury, but for one reason or another, the places were abandoned and being reclaimed by nature. It always fascinated me to see the before and after pictures and wonder if the people who visited those places at the height of their prosperity ever imagined the place looking like it did in a few short years.

Today, we are going to read how Judah was once a great nation with great power and great hope for the future. Yet, because of their sin and rejection of God, they would soon become like a waste land.

What Does the Bible Say?

Ezekiel was told to give a lamentation or a type of funeral song for the princes (kings) of Israel. The first picture given was that of a lioness who reared her cubs. The lioness appears to be a picture of the nation of Judah. One of these cubs became a young lion who learned how to catch his prey and destroy it. This brought fear to the men in the area who decided to dig a pit and catch this young lion. They then took this lion with hooks to the land of Egypt, never to return again. This appears to be a reference to Jehoahaz who only ruled for three months before Pharaoh Necho took him down to Egypt where he died (vs 1-4).

The lioness is pictured as taking another one of her cubs and making him a young lion. He learned like the other cub did, but he not only devoured prey, but was also oppressive to his own people by taking advantage of widows and crushing cities who would not give him what he wanted. This turned many in the land against him and angered the nations around him. One of these nations, Babylon, took him in to custody and brought him back to their land. This appears to be a reference to Jehoiachin who was imprisoned in Babylon for 37 years (vs 5-9).

Judah was then pictured as a vine which was planted by a place with

abundant water allowing it to grow full of fruit, producing branches. This nation did grow strong and the rulers had great power, but this power was not going to last. They were becoming like a vine that was pulled out of the ground causing the branches and leaves to start to dry up. It stopped producing fruit and much of it started to burn up. There was no longer any power, strength or life in this vine. There would be no more rulers since there would be nothing left to rule over. This appears to be the prediction of the end for Judah. At the time that this was being written Judah was barely hanging on as a nation. They were about to face complete destruction as a nation, and would not fully rule over their land after this. Even today, in the nation of Israel, there are many portions of their land that they do not have control over. This was a great lamentation. The once strong nation was now being reduced to ruins (vs 14).

How Does this Apply to Me?

As I read this chapter, two things kept coming to my mind. Church buildings and individual believers. I have had the opportunity to visit large church buildings which were once active hubs of spiritual lives for those who attended, but have now become more of a museum with very little, if any, spiritual work going on in those buildings. The reason for the demise of the spiritual activity could be numerous, but in most cases it could be boiled down to the fact that the people of the church abandoned the Word of God and started living for themselves. The same could be said about many people that come to my mind who at one time were actively involved in serving the Lord. Somewhere along the line, these individuals stopped living for God and started living for themselves. The end result is often a messed up life. I am not mentioning any of this so that we can condemn others, but I mention it as a reminder of the importance of guarding our own lives so we do not end up like many who have gone before.

Suggestions for Prayer

* *Ask God to help you remain faithful to Him and His Word.*

Thought for the day

What did God tell Ezekiel to “take up” (vs 1) - ESV?

Who was this directed towards (vs 1)?

How was the mother in this story described (vs 2)?

Who do you think the mother was (vs 2)?

What did she raise (vs 2)?

Who did these cubs represent (vs 2-3)?

What happened to this young lion (vs 4)?

What did the mother realize (vs 5)?

What did she do next (vs 5)?

How did this lion choose to live (vs 6-7)?

How did the nations respond (vs 8)?

What happened to this lion (vs 9)?

What is the mother compared to in verse 10?

What did the strong stems become (vs 11)?

What do you think this is a picture of?

What happened to the vine (vs 12)?

What do you think verse 13 is a reference to?

What was the end result (vs 14)?

What did Ezekiel say about this lamentation (vs 14)? What do you think he meant?

“*Learning From The Past*”

Study: Ezekiel 20:1-21

Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1

Memory: Psalm 100:5

After I graduated from Bible college, I interacted with a few different pastors on a regular basis. From these men I learned many valuable lessons about some of the things I wanted to do as a pastor and some of the things that I didn’t want to do as a pastor. Though these men loved God and had dedicated their lives to serve Him, just like all of us, there were things in their lives which I did not care for and things that I really respected. I didn’t just want to follow one man, but I wanted to learn from their victories and their failures so that I could be all that God wanted me to be.

Today, we are going to be reminded how important it is to evaluate the lives of those who have gone before us. This is not for the purpose of criticism or self-exaltation, but it is vital to learn from the victories and the failures of the past.

What Does the Bible Say?

Ezekiel said that this prophecy came to him in the seventh year. This was most likely in August of 591 B.C. as the seventh year was a reference to how many years it had been since the 598 B.C. Babylonian invasion. Ezekiel had been taken captive at that time along with many of the elders of Judah. These elders came to Ezekiel to hear from God, most likely they were asking for wisdom and direction. Their inquiry to God was not received well by Him as He declared that He was not going to answer them. Ezekiel was told to judge and condemn the leaders because of the abominations that their fathers had committed that were still being allowed to continue among the people (vs 1-4).

God recounted how He had promised the nation of Israel that His presence would be among them. He reminded them how He had promised to lead them out of the land of Egypt and give them the abundant land of Israel. He described the land He promised as “the most glorious of all lands” (ESV). What He asked of the people was that they choose to throw off the detestable images and practices of the Egyptians,

but they chose not to listen. Instead, they continued in the wicked practices of the Egyptians, living for the flesh and not for the things of God. Even in this rebellion, God chose to be gracious to them and delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. He led them to the desert where He gave them His laws and promised them that if they kept His rules, they would experience great and abundant lives. He chose to give them the Sabbath day as a day of rest which would be a constant reminder and sign of the covenant that He had made to them. Even after all of this, the people still rebelled and chose to reject His rules (vs 5-13).

There in the wilderness, God wanted to destroy the Israelites and start over with a new nation from the seed of Moses, but He did not want the foreign nations to have a warped image of who He was. He allowed their forefathers to live in the wilderness, but did not allow most of them into the land which flowed with milk and honey. He did not destroy them, but allowed their descendants to enter into the land (vs 14-18).

Since their parents did not listen, God spoke to the children and told them to learn from their fathers to keep His rules and to choose not to defile themselves with idols. He wanted to renew His covenant with them, but the children did not learn from their fathers. There were periods of time where they followed God, but an overall picture of the Israelite nation is one of a nation that lived for their flesh and the things of the world around them rather than living for God (vs 19-21).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you learn from the mistakes or others, or do you repeat the mistakes of others? The key to living differently than those who have gone before you is to consciously choose to learn from their mistakes and the victories. There are those in your life who you should take note of and seek to follow their example of godliness and righteousness and there are those from whom you can learn from and avoid their failures. The easy thing to do in life is to just live without thinking. When you choose to live that way, you just naturally do what you have seen or what you think is right which is normally not the best way to live. Choose each day to evaluate the lives of those who have gone before you and choose to live in a way that pleases God.

Suggestions for Prayer

* *Ask God to help you learn lessons from those who have gone before.*

When was this word from God delivered (vs 1)?

What did the elders choose to do (vs 1)?

What did God declare He would not do (vs 2-3)?

What did God want Ezekiel to do for the elders (vs 4)?

What did God do for the Israelites while they were in Egypt (vs 5)?

What had God promised to them (vs 6)?

What did God ask them to do (vs 7)?

What did the people do with God's request (vs 8)?

What did God want to do (vs 8)?

Why did God not do this (vs 9)?

What did God in His mercy and grace choose to do (vs 10)?

What did God make clear to them (vs 11)?

What did God give to them as a sign of His covenant (vs 12)? What do you think this means?

How did the house of Israel respond (vs 13)?

What did God want to do (vs 13)? Why didn't He do it (vs 14)?

What did God not allow to happen (vs 15)? Why not (vs 16)?

What did God tell their children (vs 18)?

How did God want them to live (vs 19-20)?

How did the children respond (vs 21)?

“A Change in Circumstances”

Study: Ezekiel 20:22-29

Reading: James 1:12-18, Genesis 39:1-23

Memory: Psalm 100:5

Over the years I have talked to many single Christian men who have struggled with sexual temptations and expressed great interest into getting married believing that their marriage will solve their sexual sins. I have also spoken with many married men who have told me that they still struggled with sexual sin even after they were married and that those temptations often became worse. Whenever I counsel single men about this issue, I challenge them to gain the victory over sexual sin before they are married. I try to help them realize that their circumstances will not change their heart.

Today, we will read how the circumstances for Israel changed, but their hearts did not change with the circumstances.

What Does the Bible Say?

When the Israelite elders in captivity went to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord, God declared to them why they were facing such hard times. Their fathers had continually rebelled, even though in His mercy, God spared them from great judgment. Instead of destroying them as a people, He wanted to protect His name among the foreign nations so He did what He could to hold back His anger. When they were delivered from Egypt God had told them that if they chose to disobey His rules and worship the idols of the world, He would scatter them to different parts throughout the world (vs 22-24).

Verse 25 is an interesting verse that has been given a few interpretations. The ESV makes it sound like God gave them statues and rules that did not bring life, but that would contradict what He said in other passages in Ezekiel. It appears best to view this with the understanding that God gave them over to the statutes and rules of the pagan nations which didn't bring life. Instead, some of this idol worship insisted that their firstborn child be offered as a living sacrifice to their gods. Many of the pagan gifts that were offered to bring peace to them were actually the things that were causing them harm. God wanted them

to understand that these wicked sacrifices were hurtful while the sacrifices that He required in His law were meant to bring life (vs 25-26).

Not only had the Israelites failed to follow God in Egypt and the desert, when He brought them into the promise land they continued in their wicked way. Though their circumstances changed, their hearts did not change. In this new land of abundance, they chose to indulge in the sins of the society that had already existed in the land. They designated hills and trees as places where they would sacrifice to their false gods. Instead of offering their sacrifices to God, they gave them to every other god they could think of (vs 27-28).

Verse 29 is an interesting verse. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary “With a wordplay Ezekiel emphasized the sin of the people by asking them, What is this high place (mâh habamâh) you go to? (haba’im) The similarity of these words underscored the point that Israel had turned to idol worship.”

How Does this Apply to Me?

Have you ever thought that if your circumstances were different then following God would be much easier? If you look at the scenarios presented for the Israelites, they were under slavery in Egypt, they were led by God directly by a pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness and they were given a land that was already full of wealth that they did not have to work for. Those are three very different circumstances, but the common denominator for all three of these is that they chose not to obey God and chose to follow the way of the world around them. This is vital to understand because it is very easy to think that if your circumstances were different, you would be much different. Yes, things would not be the same, but circumstances don't change the heart. It is often the heart that changes the circumstances. Choose today, no matter what situation you are in, to follow God with your whole heart.

Suggestions for Prayer

- * Ask God to give you a change of heart to be victorious over sin.
- * Thank God because He can give you victory over sin.

Thought for the day

What are the places the Israelites had been and had chosen not to listen to God and follow His ways (vs 1-21)?

Why did God not bring His hand of destruction on them (vs 22)?

What does this reveal about God?

What did God say He would do to Israel if they chose not to walk in His ways (vs 23)?

Why do you think this was emphasized to the exiles (vs 23)?

Why was this going to happen to the people (vs 23)?

Why is it important to realize that the Israelites brought judgement upon themselves?

What type of rules did the people follow instead of following God's rules (vs 25)?

What were the end results of these rules?

Why did God say He was going to devastate them (vs 26)?

What had their fathers done (vs 27)?

What did they do once they entered the promise land (vs 28)?

Why do you think the descriptions of what they did was so vivid (vs 28)?

Describe how and why God wanted these things for Himself?

Why do you think "high places" were talked about so much in the Old Testament (vs 29)?

What do you think the "high places" of today would be?

What lesson can you learn from today's reading?

Memory Verse:

Psalms 100:1 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! 2 Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! 3 Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! 5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.