

The Lesson of Three Generations—Individual Moral Responsibility

Ezekiel 18

18:1 And YHWH's word came to me, saying: 18:2 What (is it) to / for you (plural), using a proverb—this proverb, upon Israel's ground, saying, Fathers eat sour / unripe grapes, and the children's teeth are blunt? 18:3 (As) I live—(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH—it shall not be yours (plural) again, to use a proverb, this proverb, in Israel! 18:4 Look—all the inner-most-beings / lives—they belong to Me! Like a life of the father, and like a life of the son—they belong to Me! The life that sins, it will die! 18:5 And a man / person who will be righteous, and will do justice and righteousness--18:6 upon the mountains, he did not eat; and his eyes, he did not lift up to (the) idols / blocks (of wood) of Israel's house / temple; and his neighbor's wife he did not defile; and to a menstruating woman he does not draw near; 18:7 and a man / person he will not oppress; his pledge to a debtor he returns; spoil / plunder he will not tear away. His bread / food to the hungry person he gives, and a naked person he covers (with) a garment. 18:8 With / for the interest (added) he will not give / lend, and increase he will not take. From injustice, he will draw back his hand. Justice of true-faithfulness he will do / practice, between man to man. 18:9 In / by My statutes he walks, and My legal decisions he kept, to do / practice true-faithfulness. Righteous (is) he! He shall surely live! It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH. 18:10 And he gives birth (to) a violent son, who sheds blood, and he does, alas! from one from these (forbidden things); 18:11 and he—all these things he (his father) did not do—because also to / upon the mountains he ate, and his neighbor's wife he defiled; 18:12 An afflicted poor person and a person in want he oppressed; plunder / spoil he tore away; a pledge he did not return; and to the idols / blocks of wood he lifted up his eyes; an abomination he did / practiced! 18:13 At the interest he gave / loaned, and increase he received; and shall he live? He shall surely not live! All of these abominations he did—he shall surely die! His blood will be upon him! 18:14 And look—he gave birth to a son; and he saw all the sins of his father, which he did; and he was afraid, and did not do like them. 18:15 Upon the mountains he did not eat; and his eyes he did not lift up to (the) idols / blocks of wood of Israel's house / temple; his neighbor's wife he did not defile. 18:16 And a man / person he did not oppress; a pledge he did not demand, and plunder / spoil he did not tear away; his bread / food to a hungry person he gave, and a naked person he covered (with) a garment. 18:17 From an afflicted poor person he withdrew his hand; interest and increase he did not take. My judicial decisions he did; in / by My statutes he walked. He will not die in / for the iniquity of his father. He shall surely live! 18:18 His father, because he truly oppressed, he tore away (the) plunder / spoil of a brother, and that which is not good he did in the midst of his people; and look—he died in / by his iniquity! 18:19 And you (plural) say, For what reason shall not the son bear the iniquity of the father? And the son—justice and righteousness he did; all My statutes he observed, and he did them--he shall surely live! 18:20 The innermost-being / person, the one sinning, he shall die; a son shall not carry / lift up in the iniquity of the father; and a father shall not carry / lift up in the iniquity of the son; righteousness of the righteous person upon him will be, and wickedness of the wicked person upon him will be. 18:21 And the wicked person that turns around / repents from all his sins which he did, and observes all My statutes, and does justice and righteousness, he shall surely live—he will not die! 18:22 All his transgress-

ions which he did will not be remembered to / for him; in / by his righteousness which he did, he shall live! 18:23 Shall I truly take delight (in the) death of a wicked person? (It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH—and shall he not by his turning around / repentance from his ways live? 18:24 And when a righteous person turns from his righteousness, and does injustice, like all the abominations which the wicked person did, shall he do (them) and live? All his righteousnesses which he did will not be remembered; by his unfaithfulness which he did unfaithfully, and by his sin by which he sinned, by them he shall die! 18:25 And you (plural) said, It is not estimated / adjusted, my Lord’s way! Listen now, house of Israel, Is My way not estimated / adjusted? Are not your (plural) ways not estimated / adjusted? 18:26 When turning back / repenting, a righteous person from his righteousness, and he does injustice, and dies over / because of them, in / by his injustice which he did he will die. 18:27 And when turning back / repenting a wicked person from his wickedness which he did, and he did justice and righteousness—he will preserve alive his innermost-being / life! 18:28 And he feared, and he repented from all his transgressions which he did—he shall surely live, he will not die! 18:29 And they will say—(in the) house of Israel—It is not estimated / adjusted, (the) way of my Lord! Are My ways not estimated / adjusted, house of Israel? Are not your ways not estimated / adjusted? 18:30 Therefore each man / person, according to his ways, I will judge you, house of Israel—(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH! Turn around / repent! And cause to turn around / repent from all your transgressions! And it will not be for you (plural) for a stumbling-block of iniquity! 18:31 Throw away from upon you all your transgressions by which you transgressed! And make for yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit! And for what reason will you (plural) die, house of Israel? 18:32 Because I will not be delighted when the dead person dies—(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH—and cause to turn around / repent, and live!⁷⁶³

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Rabbi Fisch comments on **chapter 18** that “It seems that Ezekiel’s fellow-exiles uttered charges against Divine justice in regard to their fate. Considering themselves better men than their fathers, they attributed their suffering to the sins of their ancestors, voicing their bewilderment and chagrin in the proverb once current in Jerusalem, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge* (**Jeremiah 31:28**)...

“To this allegation the prophet devotes the whole of this chapter, which may be divided into two principal parts:

- (1) Every person is held responsible for his own conduct whether he be good or bad; neither the wrongdoings nor the righteous deeds of others—not even those of the next-of-kin—determine the fate of a man. The righteous will enjoy God’s favor, and the wicked will be doomed.
- (2) Man is not the slave of a predestined fate; his conduct is not dictated by instinct and inherent inclination. He is free to choose between good and evil; he has the power to repent and amend his former way of life.

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As a fitting summary, Ezekiel concludes with an urgent call to the house of Israel to cast away all their sins and make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit, for God is not only a just a Judge but also a merciful Father Who delights in the well-being of His children.” (P. 107)

Eichrodt entitles **verses 1-4** “A Blasphemous Proverb.” He states that in **verses 1-3** “[YHWH] calls the prophet’s attention to a winged word, which is current among the exiles. Its content is such a defiant protest against the way [YHWH] treats His people that Yahweh announces with a solemn oath that He will abolish this watchword of mutiny from among the community...

“True, this mocking proverb does not actually name Yahweh. But it upsets a fundamental conviction in regard to His providential government, a conviction which Israel had so far successfully preserved inviolate in the face of all her temptations to think otherwise: the conviction that His retribution was always just. The manner in which this comes to pass reveals such a loss of all awe or reverence and expresses such a bitterly hostile criticism of [YHWH]’s government as to make us aware of a very dangerous dissolution of the old relationship of faith and trust in the covenant God of Israel. This is flippant criticism, trying by a brief, bitter mocking phrase to suggest the senselessness of believing in the righteousness of [YHWH].” (P. 234)

And Ezekiel goes into great detail to make a simple point. Eichrodt holds that Ezekiel’s wordiness here is an indication of his priestly background. “Admittedly, when [he] borrows the terminology of priestly law [his] message moves forward ponderously, weighted down by all the repetitions by which the lawyer tries to give full technical expression to the excellence of his advice. But on the other hand, a theme stated in this legal form can develop every one of its aspects, and lead on with logical precision to a verdict which is hard to refute, and whose weighty formulations state the irrevocability of the Divine will, which allows no possibility of appeal, so that human pretexts and excuses are useless...He makes a masterly use of a means...available to him, in order to unfold a prophetic message of great independence, one which in our opinion is very sharply opposed to the general tendency of the priestly tradition...This type of style reaches its most effective development in the forcible piece of instruction on the subject of Divine retribution in **chapter 18**.” (Pp. 16-17)

Reimer entitles **chapter 18** “Moral Responsibility.” He comments that **chapter 18** is sometimes thought to present a novel understanding of Hebrew ethics, as the high politics of **chapters 17 and 19** give way to the lot of ordinary people. Some view the notions of corporate responsibility (compare **Joshua 7:19-26** [Achan’s sons and daughters killed for Achan’s sin] and accumulated guilt (compare **2 Kings 23:26** [YHWH’s wrath against Judah for Manasseh’s sins] as the primary context for Ezekiel’s teaching and observe that, here in **Ezekiel 18**, He appears to depart from that context and focus on the moral responsibility of the individual...

“Of course, this reading sits well with modern individualism (which rightly stresses individual moral accountability) but it misses the primary communal focus of **Ezekiel**. Ezekiel’s ‘you’ addresses (continued...)

18:1⁷⁶⁴ וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's word came to me, saying:

⁷⁶³(...continued)

are consistently in the plural (note also 'house of Israel' in **verses 25 and 29**). "The primary focus of this chapter is not so much on legal individual culpability as on Divine justice resting afresh on each generation in accord with what that generation deserves." (P. 1523) Do you agree with Reimer? It appears to us that Ezekiel's view is a denial of such views as that of **Joshua 7:19-26**, where sons and daughters of Achan are put to death for their father's sin, and there is no indication that they took part in his sin. Is that a case of YHWH's dealing with sin in an earlier fashion / dispensation, and now Ezekiel is announcing a new fashion / dispensation, as YHWH deals with sin in a different way? If you say this is the case, what effect will that have on your earlier understanding of "dispensations"?

Matties comments on **chapter 18** that "Ezekiel calls for the transformation of the exilic community into a community of character by refuting common opinions about how [YHWH] governs the moral order and by inviting the community to choose the path of righteousness, justice, and life." (P. 1179)

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Reimer entitles **verses 1-4** "The One Who Sins Dies." He quotes the saying, 'fathers have eaten sour grapes...children's teeth are set on edge,' and says to compare **Jeremiah 31:29**,

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם לֹא־יֹאמְרוּ עוֹד

In those days, they will not say again,

אָבוֹת אָכְלוּ בְּסוֹר

Fathers ate unripe / sour grapes,

וְשָׁנֵי בָנִים תִּקְהָיְנָה:

and (the) teeth of children / sons will be blunted / numbed!

Reimer states: "Once again a proverb (compare **Ezekiel 12:22**) is introduced as a vehicle for an oracle. The second-person plural forms (What do you mean?) address the whole community in exile. The exilic setting itself is significant...The conclusion: Repent! Repentance is not being urged in Jerusalem, for the preceding chapters affirm that its destruction is assured. Rather, the exiles are pressed to repent and take responsibility for their moral lives. Thus the appeal is to make yourselves a new heart and spirit, in contrast to **11:19** and **26:26**, where these are the gift of [YHWH]. The restatement of [YHWH's] displeasure in anyone's death (**18:32**; compare **verse 23** and **33:11**) is the basis for the final entreaty to turn, and live." (Pp. 1423-24)

18:2 מִה־לָּכֶם אַתֶּם מוֹשְׁלִים אֶת־הַמֶּשֶׁל הַזֶּה

What (is it) to / for you (plural), making a proverb—this proverb,⁷⁶⁵

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Hilmer likewise says to compare **Jeremiah 31:29**,

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם לֹא־יֹאמְרוּ עוֹד

In those days, they will not say again,

אָבוֹת אָכְלוּ בְּסָר

Fathers ate unripe / sour grapes,

וְשָׁנֵי בָנִים תִּקְהֶינָה:

and (the) teeth of children / sons will be blunted / numbed!

(which indicates that the proverb arose first in Jerusalem. Jeremiah predicted the cessation of the proverb, and Ezekiel said its end had come)...

“The proverb, though it expresses self-pity, fatalism and despair, and though it mocks the justice of [YHWH], had its origin in Israelite belief in solidarity. See **Exodus 20:5-6**,

5 לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם

You shall not bow down to them (idols),

וְלֹא תַעֲבָדֵם

and you shall not serve them;

כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

because I, YHWH your God—

אֵל קַנָּא

a jealous God,

פֹּקֵד עוֹן אָבֹת עַל־בָּנִים

visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons,

עַל־שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל־רְבָעִים לְשִׁנְאִי:

upon thirds and upon fourths, to the ones hating Me,

6 וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים

and practicing steadfast love to the thousands,

לְאַהֲבֵי

to the ones who love Me,

וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי:

and to those who keep My commandments!

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עַל-אַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר

upon Israel's ground, saying,

אָבוֹת יֹאכְלוּ בְּסֹר

Fathers eat sour / unripe grapes,⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵(...continued)

Exodus 34:6-7,

6 וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה | עַל-פְּנֵי

And YHWH crossed over before his faces;

וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה | יְהוָה

and He cried out, YHWH, YHWH,

אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן

a Supreme God compassionate and merciful,

אָרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת:

long-suffering and great (in) steadfast love and true-faithfulness,

7 נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים

Keeping steadfast love for the thousands (of generations);

נֹשֵׂא עֲוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאת

bearing / forgiving iniquity and transgressions and missing-of-the-mark;

וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה

and will certainly not acquit (the impenitent)–

פֶּקַדוֹ | עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בְּנֵי בָנִים

visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons, and upon sons of sons,

עַל-שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל-רְבָעִים:

upon third (generation)s and upon fourth (generation)s!

and Ezekiel's own words in **chapters 16** and **23**. In **Lamentations 5:7** the thought appears as a sincere confession:

אָבֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ (אֵינָם) [וְאֵינָם]

Our fathers sinned, and they are not (alive);

[וְאֵינָם] [וְאֵינָם] עֹנֵתֵיהֶם סָבְלוּ:

(and) we bore their guilts / iniquities.

(P. 1249)

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וְשֵׁנֵי הַבָּנִים תִּקְהֶינָה:

and the children's teeth are blunt?⁷⁶⁷

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Rabbi Fisch notes that “In **Jeremiah 31:28** the verb is in the perfect, but here in the imperfect mood: ‘the fathers eat.’” (P. 108)

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Rahfs translates by ἐγομφίασαν, “were ground.” Hilmer states that “The Hebrew for this phrase [‘set on edge’] perhaps means ‘blunted’ or ‘worn,’ but it may refer to the sensation in the mouth when eating something bitter or sour.” (P. 1249)

Matties comments that “The citation of a popular proverb (**verse 2**) reflects not only a statement about the punishment of children for the sins of the parents (see **Jeremiah 31:29**). The proverb reflects resignation and a loss of hope rooted in a fatalistic view of the moral order.” (P. 1179)

Darr states that “Ezekiel’s God immediately challenges a popular proverb concerning (or ‘in’) the land of Israel. In Hebrew, this proverb (‘the parents have eaten sour grapes (בָּסֵר, bhoser; **Isaiah 18:5**; **Job 15:33**; **Jeremiah 31:29-30**) and the children’s teeth are blunted’) consists of only six words. Here, then, is a *mashal* (‘proverb’) like those in **12:22, 27** and **16:44**—a succinct saying common among the folk...Within Israel’s traditions, trans-generational retribution is at issue especially in theocentric arenas—sacral law, prophetic judgment oracles, etc. Within such arenas, Israel speaks not of ‘an immutable law of the universe,’ but of the justice or injustice of Divine governance.

“The belief that, according to the rules of a Deity’s reign, the penalty for sin was suffered not only by the perpetrator, but also by his contemporary family and subsequent generations, was not Israel’s alone. It surfaces in the Hittite Instructions for Temple Officials. ‘If a slave causes his master’s anger, they either kill him or they will injure him...or they will seize him, his wife, his children, his brother, his sister, his in-laws, his kin...If ever he is to die, he will not die alone; his kin will accompany him. If then ...anyone arouses the anger of a God, does the God take revenge on him alone? Does He not take revenge on his wife, his children, his descendants, his kin, his slaves, and slave-girls, his cattle (and) sheep together with his crop, and will utterly destroy him? [See Pritchard’s **ANET**, pp. 207, 209]...Within the **Hebrew Bible**, the principle of transgenerational retribution is applied to Achan and his family (**Joshua 7:22-26**), etc.” (Pp. 144-145)

Eichrodt comments that “When one eats grapes that are not as yet quite ripe, but whose slightly bitter taste is all the more refreshing, one as a rule experiences a slightly unpleasant sensation as if a thin coating had come upon one’s teeth—as if they had been ‘set on edge,’ as the Hebrew word expresses it. Anyone who eats such grapes must put up with the after-effects. But it would be absurd if this were to

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happen to someone who had eaten no grapes...Can the punishment of the innocent in place of the guilty be described as conduct worthy of the Divine Judge?

“The opinion voiced here witnesses to a profound alteration in Israelite beliefs, which came to its full development towards the end of the period of the monarchy. It calls in question a conviction which had been taken for granted and never been questioned in early Israel, and had been already given clear expression in the explanations to the Decalogue (**Exodus 20:5-7; Deuteronomy 5:9-10**), that is to say, the idea of inherited guilt. Because the members of the people do not exist as isolated individuals, but stand together, being indissolubly connected by a solidarity which makes them able to fit in with and act on behalf of each other and because this association also extends to successive generations involving them in an organism extending over successive periods of time, then it must necessarily be true that the guilt of the father is avenged upon the children, and that guilt piled up in earlier generations brings later generations to ruin.

“Such a conception of collective retribution was widespread in ancient times...so misfortunes suffered by those who had not directly contracted guilt were easier to accept in view of the immediacy of the link between their life and that of the whole people, and the problem spelled no threat to their faith in [YHWH’s] righteousness. Changes set in, when the links by which the nation was bound together broke down from within during the seventh century...The effects of collective guilt transcending the individual in the form of great catastrophes, such as the prophets had foretold their contemporaries in such vivid and frightening terms, threatened to become a fate as meaningless and heartless as in the great Greek tragedies. But it was difficult for Israel to adopt such an impersonal conception of fate, because their living faith in the Divine Judge saw the validity of one of its most basic principles questioned here, and reacted with a strong counterattack. The individual had now come of age and asked questions about his own destiny, a satisfactory answer to which could not be provided by going back to the common destiny of the whole people...So the threat to the individual from the common destiny of all necessarily led to the passionate question to the Divine Judge, how it could be consonant with His righteousness to compel the devout man to endure sufferings he had not merited. It is no mere matter of chance that we see this problem emerge in all its intensity in **Jeremiah...12:1ff...**

“In interpreting the reply which the prophet was commissioned to make to this barefaced assault upon the righteousness of [YHWH], we must note that for Ezekiel, too, the connection between the destiny of the individual and the guilt of his ancestors was and remained an undeniable fact...He is far from defending Yahweh’s acts of judgment manifest here as the universally applicable answer to the question of [YHWH’s] righteousness. This is because [YHWH] Himself has disclosed to him a second form of Divine retribution, which gives the total reckoning a different complexion.” (Pp. 234-37)

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The proverb means, ‘Is it just that one generation should be punished for the sins of its predecessors?’ What may have given rise to this belief was the statement made in

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the name of God that the sins of Manasseh were the cause of Israel's downfall, although the disaster happened about half-a-century later. Compare **2 Kings 21:10-12**,

- 10 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה בְּיַד־עַבְדָּיו הַנְּבִיאִים לֵאמֹר:
And YHWH spoke by (the) hand of His servants, the prophets, saying:
- 11 יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מְנַשֶּׁה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה הַתַּעֲבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה
Because Menasseh, king of Judah, did these abominations / detestable acts,
הָרַע מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר לְפָנָיו
he did evil more than all that the Amorites did who (were) before him;
וַיַּחַטֵּא גַם־אֶת־יְהוּדָה בַּגְּלוּלָיו:
and he caused Judah to sin with his idols.
- 12 לְכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
Therefore in this way YHWH God of Israel spoke:
הִנְנִי מְבִיא רָעָה עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְיְהוּדָה
Look at Me—bringing evil upon Jerusalem and Judah—
אֲשֶׁר כָּל־[שְׁמָעוֹ] [שְׁמָעָה] תִּצְלְנָה שְׁתֵּי אָזְנוֹ
which, everyone hearing it, his two ears will tingle!

Compare **Jeremiah 31:29**, which is the first mention of the proverb's being used in Jerusalem, as Jeremiah predicted the cessation of its use. Ezekiel states that now it is time to quit using this proverb. The proverb can easily be used in terms of self-pity, or fatalism, or it can be used in a way that makes a mockery of YHWH's justice. It had its origin in the biblical teaching concerning corporate solidarity, as found in such passages as:

Exodus 20:5, where the worship of other Gods / idols is forbidden:

לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם

You (plural) shall not bow down to them, and you shall not serve them!

כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא

Because I, YHWH your God, (am) El / Supreme God, jealous--

פֹּקֵד עֵוֹן אָבֹת עַל־בָּנִים

visiting (with punishment) iniquity of father upon sons / children,

עַל־שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאֵי:

upon third and upon fourth (generations), to those hating Me.

Exodus 34:7, where YHWH, revealing His character as a God of steadfast-love, states:

נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים

guarding / keeping steadfast-love for the thousands,

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נִשָּׂא עֵוֹן וּפְשָׁע וַחֲטָאָה

bearing / forgiving iniquity and transgression and missing-of-the-mark;

וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה

but He will certainly not acquit (the guilty),

פָּקַדוּ עֵוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בְּנֵי בָנִים

visiting (for punishment) iniquity of fathers upon sons and upon grandsons,

עַל-שְׁלִישִׁים וְעַל-רְבָעִים:

upon third(s) and upon fourth(s) (generations)!

These passages teach that the iniquities of parents come to bear upon succeeding generations--which is, of course, the truth of history. But there is no fatalistic element involved--especially when there is a change in character on the part of the later generations. That is what Ezekiel emphasizes, showing how their use of this proverb destroys individual responsibility--and is therefore mistaken and untrue. As Matties puts it, "Ezekiel utilizes and transforms the commonly known 'generational' texts... to emphasize that moral accountability does not cross generational lines." (P. 1180)

Ezekiel describes three generations (compare the earlier "to the thirds and fourths (generations) ..."). He gives three differing lists of commandments to which each generation is subject--showing that he has no concept of one legalistic set of commandments (the first list has between 12 to 17 commandments, depending on how they are read; the second has some 8 to 10 commandments; while the third has some 10 to 12 commandments, again depending on how they are read. The lists are very similar, but differ in significant ways--the point being that each list is a description of what is "just and righteous," but not a legalistic, exact, or complete law-code, that must follow a specific order. Compare the "Ten Commandments" found in **Exodus 20** and **Deuteronomy 5**. What happens to each generation depends on whether or not they observe these commandments, practicing justice and righteousness. If they do so, they will be considered "righteous" by YHWH; if they do not, they will not be considered "righteous," but "wicked," and must die as a consequence of their own failure. The so-called "chain" of inherited guilt can therefore be broken from one generation to another; but so can the much more powerful "chain" of inherited righteousness. **Verses 21-29** show that even the "chain" of accumulated guilt within one individual's life can be broken through "turning around."

This constitutes Ezekiel's second call to "turning around" (compare **14:6**). It is a powerful statement in **18:30-32**, considered by some students of **Ezekiel** to be the most important theological statement in the entirety of his **Scroll**. "Get a new heart, and a new spirit! Why will you die?...Turn around, and live!" There can be no mistaking of the basic hope that breathes throughout such a theology. Ezekiel obviously believes that the people of Israel can turn around, and that YHWH will give them life--i.e., he is no "Calvinist." He believes that it is possible for the people to have control of their own

(continued...)

18:3 חַי־אֲנִי נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה

(As) I live–(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH⁷⁶⁸

אִם־יִהְיֶה לְכֶם עוֹד מִשָּׁל הַמֶּשֶׁל הַזֶּה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

it shall not be yours (plural) again, to use a proverb, this proverb, in Israel!⁷⁶⁹

18:4⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁷(...continued)

destiny, and that they are not the helpless victims of a Divine fate. Compare in the **New Testament** documents such passages as **Philippians 2:12-13**,

12 Ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου,

So then, my beloved ones,
καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε,
just as you have always obeyed,

μὴ ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον
not as in my presence only,

ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου,
but rather now much more in my absence—

μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε·
with fear and trembling work out your (plural) own salvation!

13 θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν

For God is the One working in you (plural),
καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν
both to will and to work

ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας.

on behalf of the good pleasure (of His).

⁷⁶⁸

For this phrase “As I live” in the mouth of YHWH, see footnote 461. It is a “Divine oath.”

⁷⁶⁹

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The current proverb will no more be used because experience will prove it to be untrue.” (P. 108)

⁷⁷⁰

Eichrodt comments on **verse 4** that “So the stress at the beginning of the Divine address on [YHWH’s] absolute right as Creator to deal with all men as He wills is no mere formality. He can give a man over to death, just as He called him into life. He can also decide that the son shall take the place of the father without anyone calling Him to account. Here, too, [YHWH’s] transcendent superiority to all
(continued...)

הֵן כָּל-הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת לִי הֵנָּה

Look—all the innermost-beings / lives—they belong to Me!⁷⁷¹

כְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָב וְכְנֶפֶשׁ הַבֵּן

Like a life of the father, and like a life of the son—

לִי-הֵנָּה

they belong to Me!

⁷⁷⁰(...continued)

human complaints and attempts at self-justification, so dominant later in the **Scroll of Job**, is the presupposition from which all the consequences must be drawn. And [YHWH] now proclaims that it is His righteous will to judge each individual in accordance with his particular responsibility. ‘The person who sins, he alone shall die!’

“The saying thus introduces no subtle theorizing spun out of priestly theology, in order to clear away all grounds for complaining against [YHWH’s] righteousness by means of a Theodicy. No new doctrine is proclaimed here to serve as a basis for explaining how [YHWH] acts in every case. Ezekiel rather proclaims a decision made by [YHWH] for the present situation, to help those whose faith is in difficulties, and give them strength to face life afresh. That is to say, He is not speaking as a theologian, but as a prophet, whose duty it is to proclaim what [YHWH] has in actual fact willed and decided to do.” (P. 237)

Hilmer states that “Ezekiel spoke out against a false use the people were making of a doctrine of inherited guilt (perhaps based on a false understanding of **Exodus 20:5; 34:7**). What follows is his description of three men, standing for three generations, who break the three / four-generation pattern.” (P. 1249) What do you think Hilmer means by “the three / four-generation pattern”? We think he is referring to the first generation in **verse 5**; the second generation in **verse 10**; the third generation in **verse 14**. But where is the fourth generation mentioned?

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Rabbi Fisch notes that “Since God is the Creator and Owner of all individuals, they must each stand in the same relationship to Him. Even father and son, who are physically related to one another, are separate entities in the sight of God; therefore the failings of the father cannot determine the destiny of the son.” (P. 108)

And notice the claim of YHWH in this text—every living being belongs to Him—not just the Jews, not just the Christians, not just the so-called “righteous.” All living beings belong to YHWH, of whatever nationality, or whatever religion! Do you believe that? Where did you think the “spirit” “breath” of babies comes from?

הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחַטָּאָה

The life that sins,

הִיא תָּמוּת:

it will die!⁷⁷²

18:5⁷⁷³ וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִהְיֶה צַדִּיק

And a man / person who will be righteous,⁷⁷⁴

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Rabbi Fisch states that “The repetition of the pronoun *it* is to stress that only the individual sinner will suffer the consequences and no one else. The verbs *die* and *live* (**verse 9**, etc.) in this connection denote the loss of God’s favor and consequent suffering and its reverse.” (P. 108)

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Eichrodt entitles **verses 5-20** “Inherited Guilt or Personal Responsibility?” He holds that here Ezekiel “is deliberately imitating the promise of life and threat of death declared by the priest when he proclaimed the temple *torah*...His first list of demands in **verses 5-9** concludes with the solemn statement ‘he is a righteous man.’ It is so reminiscent of similar declaratory formulas, used by the priest to affirm the result of the examination he had made (**Leviticus 13:3, 6, 22** and **13:11, 13, 15-16**), that the agreement cannot be merely accidental. The prophet formulates Yahweh’s new decision which he has to announce in a way which approximates as closely as possible to the old traditional pronouncements of life and death in the cultus, which he as a priest must have come to know particularly closely.” (P. 238)

Reimer entitles **18:5-18** “Three Case Studies.” He states that “Ezekiel exemplifies his teaching by means of three generations: a righteous father (**verses 5-9**) and his wicked son (**verses 10-13**), who in turn fathers a righteous son (**verses 14-18**)...Each paragraph follows the same format—the behavior and moral character is introduced, illustrated by a list of characteristic actions, and concluded by a statement regarding either life or death, as appropriate...There are obvious resonances with the Ten Commandments, but not so close as to suggest Ezekiel is citing them. Other such lists appear in **Psalms 15** and **24**; compare also Job’s declaration of innocence in **Job 31**.” (P. 1523)

And we note here that these are some five different statements of what is considered by the biblical authors to be “ethical living,” or the “basic standard of ethics.” What do you make of this? Are these statements really different, or basically the same? One thing is for sure—they are not one final legalistic code of ethics!

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(continued...)

וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה:

and will do justice and righteousness--⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁴(...continued)

Hilmer states that “The following 15 commandments are partly ceremonial but are mostly moral injunctions.

Matties notes that “The first case [18:5-9] identifies the righteous person...as one who fulfills the common expectation of practicing justice and righteousness...The list concerns cultic violations and abuses of political, economic, and legal power, and includes both negative and positive statements. The consequent experience of life includes both freedom from the judgment of God and the goodness of ongoing life in community, even in exile.” (P. 1180)

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Rabbi Fisch holds that **verse 5** is a “general statement...defined by the particulars which follow.” (P. 108) Hilmer states that the “righteous man” is “the first generation that keeps the law.” (P. 1249) He adds that “The following 15 commandments are partly ceremonial but are mostly moral injunctions. See the Ten Commandments in **Exodus 20** and **Deuteronomy 5**; also compare:

Psalm 15:1b-5,

1b יְהוָה מִיִּיגוֹר בְּאֹהֶלְךָ

YHWH, who will spend time / be a temporary resident in Your tent / tabernacle?

˘^v,(d>q' rh;äB. !Ko^v.yI÷-ymi(

Who will settle down / dwell on Your set-apart mountain?

2 הוֹלֵךְ תְּמִים

One walking (in) completeness / wholeness,

וּפֹעֵל צְדָק

and doing righteousness,

וְדַבֵּר אֱמֶת בְּלִבּוֹ:

and speaking truth in his heart.

3 לֹא־רָגַל | עַל־לְשׁוֹנוֹ

No slander upon his tongue;

לֹא־עָשָׂה לְרֵעֵהוּ רָעָה

he did not do evil to his neighbor.

וְחִרְפָּה לֹא־נִשְׂא עַל־קָרְבוֹ:

And he did not raise a reproach concerning his companion / relative.

4 נִבְזָה | בְּעֵינָיו נִמְאָס

A rejected person was despised in his eyes;

(continued...)

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וְאֶת־יִרְאַיִ יְהוָה יִכְבֹּד

and / but ones fearing / reverencing YHWH he will honor.

נִשְׁבַּע לְהָרַע

He was sworn to cause harm / repay evil (?),

וְלֹא יִמָּר:

and he will not change!

5 כֶּסֶפוֹ | לֹא־נָתַן בְּנִשְׁבָּה

His silver / money he did not give / lend with interest;

וְשֹׁחַד עַל־נַפְקֵי לֹא לָקַח

and he did not take a bribe concerning an innocent person.

עֲשֵׂה־אֱלֹהֵי לֹא יִמוּט לְעוֹלָם:

One doing these things will not be shaken to long-lasting time!

Psalm 24:3-6,

3 מִי־יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר־יְהוָה

Who shall go up into YHWH's Mountain?

וּמִי־יִקוּם בְּמִקְוֹם קִדְשׁוֹ:

And who shall stand in [the] Place of His Set-Apartness?

4 נְקֵי כַפַּיִם וְבֵר־לֵבָב

[One with] innocent hands, and a clean heart;

אֲשֶׁר | לֹא־נִשְׂא לְשׂוֹא נַפְשֵׁי

who has not lifted up his innermost being for nothingness,

וְלֹא נִשְׁבַּע לְמַרְמָה:

and he has not taken oath for deceit[ful purposes]!

5 יִשָּׂא בְרָכָה מֵאֵת יְהוָה

He will lift up a blessing from YHWH,

וְצִדְקָה מֵאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעוֹ:

and righteousness from the God of his salvation / deliverance!

6 זֶה דֹּר (דִּרְשׁוּ) [דִּרְשׁוּ]

This is (the) generation of those who seek Him,

מִבְּקֹשֵׁי פָנֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב סֵלָה:

those who inquire after your face, O Jacob! Selah

Isaiah 33:14b-15,

(continued...)

⁷⁷⁵(...continued)

- 14b מִי יִגֹּר לָנוּ אֵשׁ אוֹכֵלָה
 Who will be a temporary resident for us (in) devouring fire?
 מִי־יִגֹּר לָנוּ מוֹקְדֵי עוֹלָם:
 Who will be a temporary resident for us (in) long-lasting burning masses?
- 15 הַלֵּךְ צְדָקוֹת
 One who walks (in) righteousneses,
 וְדַבֵּר מִיִּשְׁרָיִם
 and who speaks upright things;
 מֵאִסׁ בְּבִצְעַת מַעֲשֵׂקוֹת
 one who rejects unjust gain by extortions;
 נֶעַר כַּפְּיוֹ מִתְמַדָּ בַשְּׂחָד
 who shakes off his hands from laying hold on the bribe;
 אָטֵם אָזְנוֹ מִשְׂמֹעַ דָּמִים
 who shuts his ear from hearing (plans for) bloods / murder;
 וְעָצַם עֵינָיו מִרְאוֹת בְּרָע:
 who closes his eyes from looking at evil--
- 16 הוּא מְרוֹמִים יִשְׁכֵּן
 he will dwell (on the) heights
 מִצְדָּוֹת סֻלְעִים מְשֻׁנְבוֹ
 rocky fortresses / Masadas (will be) his refuge;
 לַחֲמוֹ נָתַן
 his food given / supplied,
 מִיַּמּוֹ נְאֻמָּנִים:
 his water(s) unfailing.

Darr comments that “Many of Ezekiel’s ordinances echo laws found in the ‘covenant code’ (Exodus 20:22-23:33), Deuteronomy, and especially the ‘holiness code’ (Leviticus 17-26).” (P. 146)

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Darr comments that “While **verse 6** reflects priestly interest in cultic and sexual pollutions, **verses 7-8** concern social morality and ethics...[The righteous man] feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. Though these actions are not explicitly commanded within the priestly law, they are of a piece with injunctions to care for the poor (see **Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 15;7-11; 24:19-21**; see also **Matthew** (continued...))

אֶל-הַהָרִים לֹא אָכַל

To / upon the mountains, he did not eat;⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁶(...continued)

25:35-36)...He is just and honest in his legal affairs. He refrains (literally ‘takes back his hand,’ (**20:22; Psalm 74:11; Lamentations 2:8**) from injustice and arbitrates between contenders in legal disputes.” (Pp. 146-147)

Eichrodt states that “what is new here [in **verses 6-8**] is the selection of the Divine demands and the sphere within which the promise derived from them is valid. What is enumerated by Ezekiel here is independent of any tie with the soil of Palestine or the temple in Jerusalem. Out of the old covenant law, following the **Scroll of the Covenant (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5)**, and the Law of Holiness in **Leviticus 17ff.**, he sets up a norm for moral and social life, which can provide a firm basis for a man’s relations with his neighbor in a foreign land. First come the commands for true worship of [YHWH], including not only a demand for strict rejection of all forms of idolatry (compare **Ezekiel 14:1ff.**), but also a prohibition of the consumption of blood...

“After the prohibition of idolatry, which must have constituted a particularly dangerous temptation among a crowd of exiles cut off from all traditional ties, the social and moral commandments present the obligations demanded by brotherly solidarity in the distressed state in which they all found themselves: restraint from the exploitation or extortion of poorer fellow countrymen and from exacting pledges from debtors; no trying to profit from their distress by enforcing certain conditions in every loan (as opposed to *neseq* [interest], *tarbit* [increase] means an additional charge to the sum lent which was demanded at the repayment of the loan); no attempt to warp justice when a dispute is being settled. As a positive counterpart, the voluntary support of the needy with food and drink is mentioned. The list is repeated in the following sections, but not with slavish exactitude. Pollution by a menstruous woman (**verse 6**) and the concern for justice (**verse 8**) are omitted, as a sign that these things are mentioned only as illustrations, and are not intended to furnish the righteous with a complete list of all things that he must or must not do. What would be shown in a similar list for the inhabitants of Jerusalem is shown by **22:6-12**, where deeds of violence and bloodshed, sacrificial meals on the hills, and offences against holy places and against foreigners are mentioned.” (Pp. 238-39)

⁷⁷⁷

Rabbi Fisch explains that the righteous person “has not worshiped the idols which were installed on mountains and high places, and has not partaken of the sacrificial meal which was part of the ritual.” (P. 110) See **Ezekiel 6:3** and **Hosea 4:13**.

Darr comments that “The meaning of **verse 6a** is somewhat obscure. The phrase ‘to eat on the mountains’ appears nowhere in Hebrew Scripture outside the **Scroll of Ezekiel**. We do, however, encounter references to sacrifices atop mountains in honor (or in the Presence) of Deities (see **2 Kings 16:4; Isaiah 65:7; Ezekiel 6:13; 20:28; 34:6; Hosea 4:13**). Ezekiel regards such activities as illicit (idolatry) (continued...) ”

וְעֵינָיו לֹא נִשָּׂא אֶל-גִּלּוּלֵי בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל

and his eyes, he did not lift up to (the) idols of Israel's house / temple (?);⁷⁷⁸

וְאֶת-אִשְׁתֵּי רֵעֵהוּ לֹא טָמָא

and his neighbor's wife he did not defile;⁷⁷⁹

וְאֶל-אִשָּׁה נֹדֶה לֹא יִקְרַב:

and to a menstruating woman he does not draw near;⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁷(...continued)

trous); the righteous man does not participate in them. Neither does he 'lift up his eyes to' (trust in help from) the 'dung pellets of the house of Israel,' Ezekiel's coarse and characteristic name for idols (see **6:4-6, 9** and **13** [twice]; the exact phrase appears in **8:10**). He does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach (for sexual intercourse) a menstruating women (see **Leviticus 15:19-24; 18:19**)." (P. 146)

⁷⁷⁸

Rabbi Fisch explains that the idols of the house of Israel were "Baal in Samaria and the golden calves set up by Jeroboam in Bethel and Dan." (P. 109)

Hilmer states that lifting up the eyes to means "seeking help from (see **23:27; 33:25; Psalm 121:1**)." (P. 1249)

⁷⁷⁹

Rabbi Fisch explains that the righteous man "is innocent of the sin of adultery." (P. 109)

⁷⁸⁰

Compare **Leviticus 18:19**,

וְאֶל-אִשָּׁה בְּנִדְתָּ טְמֵאָתָהּ לֹא תִקְרַב

And you shall not draw near to a woman in her menstrual uncleanness,

לְגַלּוֹת עֲרוּתָהּ:

to uncover her nakedness!

Leviticus 20:18,

וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁכַּב אֶת-אִשָּׁה דְּוָהּ

And a man who will lie down (for sexual intercourse) with a woman in her menstrual period;

(continued...)

18:7 וְאִישׁ לֹא יִזְנֶה

and a man / person he will not oppress,⁷⁸¹

⁷⁸⁰(...continued)

וְגִלָּה אֶת-עֲרוֹתֶיהָ

and he will uncover her nakedness;

אֶת-מְקַרְהָ הָעֵרָה

he made naked her fountain;

וְהִיא גִלְתָּה אֶת-מְקוֹר דְּמֵיהָ

and she uncovered her blood's spring;

וְנִכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם

and they shall be cut off, (the) two of them,

מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּם:

from their people's midst.

Hilmer notes that here, “Adultery (condemned in **Exodus 20:14**; **Deuteronomy 22:22**; **Leviticus 18:20**; **20:10**) is associated with a prohibition of sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period (see **Leviticus 15:19-24**; **18:19**; **20:18**), which is absent from the two listings that follow (see **verses 11** and **15**).” (P. 1249)

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Compare **Leviticus 25:14**,

וְכִי-תִמְכְּרוּ

And if you people shall sell (your possession of land),

מִמְכָּר לְעַמִּיתְךָ

a sale to your fellow;

אוֹ קָנָה מִיַּד עַמִּיתְךָ

or purchase (another's possession of land) from (the) hand of your fellow,

אַל-תִּזְנֶה

you people shall not oppress—

אִישׁ אֶת-אָחִיו:

a man his brother.

Rabbi Fisch notes that here the *Torah* “forbids fraudulent dealing in any transaction. Here and in the following two verses the prophet enumerates duties, both negative and positive, towards one's fellow-man.” (P. 109)

חִבְּלוֹתָיו חֹב יָשִׁיב

his pledge to a debtor he returns;⁷⁸²

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Rabbi Fisch states that “This alludes to the law in **Exodus 22:25-26**, which declares it the duty of the creditor to return to the borrower any article pledged for a debt which is necessary for his subsistence or comfort.” (P. 109) See **Exodus 22:25**^{Heb} / **26**^{Eng}

אִם־חִבַּלְתָּ שְׂלֵמַת רֵעֶךָ

If you truly take your neighbor's garment as bond,

עַד־בֹּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

(it must be only) until the setting of the sun--

תְּשִׁיבֵנוּ לוֹ:

you shall return it to him!

כִּי הוּא (כְּסוּתָהּ) לְבָדָהּ

Because it is his only covering;

הוּא שְׂמֹלְתוֹ לְעֵרוֹ

it is his covering for his skin / body.

בְּמָה יִשְׁכַּב

In what shall he sleep?

וְהָיָה כִּי־יִצְעַק אֵלַי

And it will happen, when he cries out to Me--

וְשָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי־חֲנוּן אֲנִי:

and I will hear, because I am gracious!

Deuteronomy 24:10-13,

10 כִּי־תִשָּׂא בְרֵעֶךָ מִשָּׂאת מְאוּמָה

If / when you (singular) lend to your neighbor a loan of any kind,

לֹא־תָבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ לְעֵבֵט עֵבֶטוֹ:

you shall not come / go into his house to take his pledge!

11 בַּחוּץ תַּעֲמֹד

You shall stand on the outside,

וְהָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה נֹשֶׂה בּוֹ

and the man to whom you are lending

יֹצֵיא אֵלֶיךָ אֶת־הָעֵבוֹט הַחוּצָה:

shall come forth to you with the pledge, to the outside.

(continued...)

גִּזְלָה לֹא יִגְזֹל

spoil / plunder he will not tear away.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸²(...continued)

12 וְאִם־אִישׁ עָנִי הוּא

And if he is a poor man,

לֹא תִשָּׁכַב בְּעֵבְטוֹ:

you shall not sleep in his pledge!

13 הָשִׁיב תְּשִׁיב לוֹ אֶת־הָעֵבוֹט כִּבְּאֵ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

You shall certainly return the pledge to him as the sun sets;

וְשָׁכַב בְּשִׁלְמָתוֹ

and he will sleep in his garment / robe;

וּבֵרַכְךָ

and he will bless you,

וְלָךְ תִּהְיֶה צְדָקָה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

and for you it will be right-relationship before YHWH your God!

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See **Leviticus 19:13**,

לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂק אֶת־רֵעֶךָ

You (singular) shall not oppress your neighbor.

וְלֹא תִגְזֹל

And you shall not take by force.

לֹא־תִלֵּין פְּעֻלַּת שָׂכִיר אֲתָךְ עַד־בֹּקֶר:

The wage of a hired person shall not remain overnight with you (singular) until morning.

Hilmer states that “This is violent (‘armed’) robbery rather than secret theft or burglary (see **Leviticus 19:13** above.

...See the commandment against stealing in:

Exodus 20:15,

לֹא תִגְנֹב:

You shall not steal!

and **Deuteronomy 5:19**,

וְלֹא תִגְנֹב:

And you shall not steal!

לְחֵמוֹ לְרֵעֵב יִתֵּן

His bread / food to the hungry person he gives,⁷⁸⁴

784

See Deuteronomy 15:7-11,

- 7 כִּי־יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאַחַד אֶחָיֶךָ
If there will be among you a poor person from one of your brothers,
בְּאַחַד שַׁעְרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצֶךָ
in one of your gates / cities, in your land
אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ
which YHWH your God is giving to you—
לֹא תִאֲמֵץ אֶת־לִבְּךָ
you shall not harden your heart,
וְלֹא תִקַּפֵּץ יָדְךָ מֵאֶחָיֶךָ אֶת־הָאֶבְיוֹן:
and you shall not withdraw your hand from your brother, the poor one.
- 8 כִּי־פִתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לּוֹ
Because you shall surely open your hand to him,
וְהֶעֱבַט תַּעֲבִיטְנוּ דֵי מַחְסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יַחְסֵר לוֹ:
and you shall surely lend to him enough for what he needs.
- 9 הִשָּׁמֶר לָךְ פֶּן־יִהְיֶה דְבַר עִם־לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לֵאמֹר
Guard yourself so that there will not be in your heart a word of worthlessness, saying,
קָרְבָה שְׁנַת־הַשְּׁבַע שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה
The seventh year, the year of remitting / releasing has drawn near;
וְרָעָה עֵינְךָ בְּאֶחָיֶךָ הָאֶבְיוֹן
and your eye will be evil against your brother, the poor one,
וְלֹא תִתֵּן לּוֹ
and you will not give to him.
וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵיךָ
And he will cry out concerning / against you to YHWH;
וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא:
and it will be in you a sin.
- 10 נָתַן תִּתֵּן לּוֹ
You shall certainly give to him;

(continued...)

וְעִירָם יְכַסֶּה בְּגָד:⁷⁸⁵

and a naked person he covers (with) a garment.⁷⁸⁵

18:8 בְּנִשְׁךָ לְאִיתָן

With / for the interest (added) he will not give / lend,

⁷⁸⁴(...continued)

וְלֹא־יִרְעַ לְבַבְךָ בְּתַתֶּךָ לּוֹ

and your heart will not be evil / grudging in your giving to him.

כִּי בְגִלְלַת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ

Because on account of this matter YHWH your God will bless you in all your work(s),

וּבְכָל־מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ:

and in every undertaking of your hand.

11 כִּי לֹא־יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ

Because (the) poor person will not cease from the land's midst;

עַל־כֵּן אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ לֵאמֹר

for that reason I am commanding you, saying,

פָּתַח תְּפִתְּחָ אֶת־יָדְךָ לְאָחִיךָ

Truly open your hand to to your brother,

לְעֹנִיךָ וּלְאֲבִינְךָ בְּאֶרֶצְךָ:

to your afflicted person and to your poor person in your land!

Compare **Isaiah 58:7**, which depicts the kind of “fasting” YHWH wants:

7 הֲלוֹא פָרַס לְרַעֲב לֶחֶמְךָ

Is it not to share your bread / food with the hungry?

וְעֵנִיִּים מְרוּדִים תְּבִיא בֵּית

And to bring homeless poor people into a home?

כִּי־תִרְאֶה עָרֹם וְכִסִּיתוּ

When you see a person without clothes, to clothe him—

וּמִבְשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם:

and from your own flesh to not hide yourself?

In the **New Testament**, see **Matthew 25:31-46**.

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See the passages just quoted in the preceding footnote.

וְתִרְבִּית לֹא יִקַּח

and increase he will not take.⁷⁸⁶

786

For this matter of charging interest on loans, see A. S. Kapelrud's article in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**, Volume X, pp. 61-65. Kapelrud states that the root word for "interest" is נִשָּׂא, **nashak**, "to bite," with the noun נִשְׂכָּה, **neshek**, a masculine noun meaning "interest," or "usury," but which is literally "something bitten off."

Kapelrud states that "This is how charging interest was viewed: as an increase 'bitten off' from the principal, i.e, an increase for the lender, 'to bite' for the receiver. The popular perception of charging interest has always been as 'biting,' and this was also clearly the case in the ancient Near East. Thus biting (*nashak*) could naturally also come to mean 'to charge interest,' and the root occurs in the **Old Testament** with both these meanings...

"[For the figurative meaning,] 'To charge interest'...see **Deuteronomy 23:20-21**^{Heb} / **19-20**^{Eng} and **Habakkuk 2:7**. **Deuteronomy 23**...is the locus classicus concerning the question of charging interest in ancient Israel. **Habakkuk 2:7** raises a cry of woe concerning those who enrich themselves with the property of others...**Deuteronomy 23**...uses the verb *nashak* in the qal and hiphil as well as the noun *neshek*: 'You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent. On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest...

"Lending without interest did occasionally appear in the ancient Near East, and both **Deuteronomy 23** and **Leviticus 25:35-37** presuppose that this was also the case in Israel. What comes to expression here is a feeling of solidarity with those belonging to the same society, an echo of the older Bedouin and farmer community. Mutual aid was a normal occurrence, and the charging of interest in such cases was viewed as 'biting.' Another consideration was that the interest rates were extraordinarily high, 20 to 50 percent not being unusual ...Furthermore, there was a distinct difference in the actual practice of dealing with interest between the farmers and nomadic merchants. Jews from the colony in Elephantine in Egypt appropriated the customs of the Egyptians and demanded interest and compound interest even from their own compatriots, though in this case the term *neshek* was not used, but rather *marbit*, which later became the term for interest...

"In the world of ancient Babylon the charging of interest was a completely normal occurrence, something seen in the many regulations found in the **Code of Hammurabi**. Babylonian merchants had no way of carrying on trade without investing their money against interest. That foreigners carried on trade in Israel emerges not least from **Deuteronomy 23:21**^{Heb} / **20**^{Eng}, and **Nehemiah 12** mentions merchants from Tyre. These people naturally demanded interest, just as interest was demanded of them
(continued...)

786(...continued)

(compare **Deuteronomy 23:21**^{Heb} / **20**^{Eng}). The regulations in **Deuteronomy 23:21**^{Heb} / **20**^{Eng} (compare **Exodus 22:24**^{Heb} / **25**^{Eng} and **Leviticus 25:36** likely represent the last attempt to preserve older customs and practices from the tribal period in the hope that the older sense of solidarity would come to expression, a notion according quite well with the primary concerns of **Deuteronomy**.” (Pp. 62-64) See: **Exodus 22:24**^{Heb} / **25**^{Eng}

אִם־כִּסְפֶךָ | תִּלְוֶה אֶת־עַמִּי

If you shall lend money to My people,

אֶת־הָעֲנִי עִמָּךְ

to the poor (who are) with you--

לֹא־תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנֹשֶׁה

you shall not be to him like a creditor;

לֹא־תִשְׂמוֹן עָלָיו נֶשֶׁךְ:

you shall not place interest on him.

Leviticus 25:35-37,

35 וְכִי־יִמְוֶךָ אָחִיךָ

And if your brother grows poor,

וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ

and his hand shakes with you;

וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ

and you shall take firm hold on him--

גֵּר וְתוֹשֵׁב

a temporary resident and stranger;

וְחָי עִמָּךְ:

and he shall live with you.

36 אַל־תִּקַּח מֵאִתּוֹ נֶשֶׁךְ וְתִרְבִּית

You (singular) shall not take from him interest and profit;

וְיִרְאַתָּ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ

and you shall tremble in awe from (before) your God;

וְחָי אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ:

and your brother shall live with you.

37 אֶת־כֶּסֶפְךָ לֹא־תִתֵּן לוֹ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ

Your silver / money you shall not give to him with interest;

וּבִמְרִבַּיִת לֹא־תִתֵּן אֹכֶלְךָ:

and you shall not give (him) your food for profit.

(continued...)

מֵעוֹל יִשִּׁיב יָדוֹ

From injustice, he will draw back his hand.⁷⁸⁷

מִשְׁפָּט אֱמֶת יַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין אִישׁ לְאִישׁ:

Justice of true-faithfulness he will do / practice, between man to man.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁶(...continued)

Deuteronomy 23:21^{Heb} / **20**^{Eng}

%yViêt; yrIåk.N"l;

You shall / may charge interest to the foreigner,

וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לְאֶחָיִךָ

but / and to your brother you shall not charge interest–

לְמַעַן יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ

so that YHWH your God may bless you in every endeavor / sending forth of your hand,

עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה

upon the land where you are coming to possess / dispossess it!

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The repetition here implies that he did not lend money on the express condition of receiving interest, nor did he accept interest offered to him voluntarily by the debtor on paying his debt (Kimchi).” (P. 109)

Hilmer states that “Ezekiel condemns usury. Interest on modern commercial loans is a different matter.” (P. 1249)

⁷⁸⁷

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The *iniquity* here intended is giving false weight or measure.” (P. 109)
Compare **Leviticus 19:35**,

לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ עוֹל בַּמִּשְׁפָּט

You (plural) shall not do wrong in the judicial decision / justice,

בַּמִּדָּה בַּמִּשְׁקָל וּבַמְּשׁוּרָה:

in the length-, in the weight-, and in the liquid-measurement(s).

⁷⁸⁸

Rabbi Fisch comments that this *true justice between man and man* is “when acting as judge between disputants.” (P. 109)

(continued...)

18:9⁷⁸⁹ בְּחֻקֹּתַי יִהְלֵךְ

In / by My statutes he walks,

וּמִשְׁפָּטַי שָׁמַר

and My legal decisions he kept,

לַעֲשׂוֹת אֱמֶת

to do / practice true-faithfulness.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁸(...continued)

And we observe that Ezekiel apparently had access to the laws of Israel there in Babylonian captivity—including the law-codes found in **Exodus**, **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy**, even if the putting together of all these law-codes in the biblical scrolls was not, as we believe, completed until the time of Ezra and even later in post-exilic times.

789

Darr states that “The summary statement of **verse 9a** declares that the righteous man faithfully obeys Yahweh’s statutes and ordinances. **Verse 9b** consists of two declaratory formulas plus the signatory formula (‘says the Lord God’). The first declaratory formula is ‘righteous is he.’ Within the **Hebrew Bible**, this formula (and minor variations of it) is typically attributed to Yahweh. Here, in Harrelson’s words, Ezekiel holds ‘before the community and its individual members the qualities of life that Yahweh approves and insists upon with the community that approaches Him as Lord.” (P. 147)

Eichrodt comments on **verse 9** that “A man may fulfil all the above-mentioned commands, and as a result be termed righteous. This, as elsewhere in the **Old Testament**, does not mean that he is sinless, or that he has shown his virtue by conforming perfectly to a comprehensive legal system, but that he is a willing member of the cultic community, who conforms with the ordinances of the community life and thus shows a right attitude towards the covenant relationship.” (Pp. 239-40)

790

This is a beautiful statement of the goal of the **Torah**, of all its statutes and judicial decisions—it is to produce **אֱמֶת**, **emeth**, which we translate by “true faithfulness.” And we think it is the goal of Israel’s judges to constantly keep the **Torah** and its applications under surveillance, adding statutes and decisions, or removing statutes and decisions, whenever “true faithfulness” is not the outcome in practice. Do you agree?

Rabbi Fisch states that the righteous person, “when obeying God’s demands...is prompted not by personal motive, but solely by the truth as revealed in the **Torah**.” (P. 110) We would change that to say “solely by the truth.” What do you think?

צָדִיק הוּא חַיָּה יְחִיָּה

Righteous (is) he! He shall surely live!^{791, 2}

791

Darr comments that “The second declaratory formula, a verdict of acquittal (‘he shall surely live,’ **verses 9b, 17, 19, 21**; see also **verses 22, 28**), is cast as the precise opposite of the death sentence, ‘he shall surely die’...Hutton explains the social function of such formulas in ancient Israel: ‘Declaratory formulae manifest the societal need to designate status to the members of society, to their actions and material surroundings...Declaratory formulae are those formulaic statements which are made by a person authorized to do so in a given situation which declare a certain action, person or object to be in a specified status with regard to the community as a whole.’” (P. 147)

Here again Ezekiel teaches that it is possible for a person to be “righteous,”—in apparent sharp conflict with the Apostle Paul’s teaching in **Romans 3**. See **Ezekiel 3:21** with its footnote 117 and also footnote 301. We love the pastoral guidance and teachings given by the Apostle Paul, but here we have to agree with Ezekiel over against Paul. What do you think?

Rabbi Fisch states that “It is such obedience to the demands of the Divine law ‘expressed in terms of practical conduct’ that ennobles and sanctifies man’s mind and elevates him to the rank of a just and righteous man...He shall surely live...however erring his forefathers may have been.” (P. 110)

This beautiful, emphatic promise, חַיָּה יְחִיָּה, “living he shall live,” occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** only in **Ezekiel**, in **verses 9, 17, 19, and 21 of chapter 18**; and then one other time, in **Ezekiel 33:13**.

For occurrences of the imperfect verb by itself, יְחִיָּה, “he shall live,” see end-note 8.

Hilmer comments that “After the checklist of commandments has been gone over, the verdict is rendered.” (P. 1249) Compare **Psalm 15:5**,

כֶּסֶף וְ לֹא־נָתַן בְּנִשְׁךְ

His silver / money he did not give / lend with interest;

וְשָׁחַד עַל־נָקִי לֹא לָקַח

and he did not take a bribe concerning an innocent person.

עֲשֵׂה־אֵלֶּה לֹא יִמוּט לְעוֹלָם:

One doing these things will not be shaken to long-lasting time!

Psalm 24:5,

יִשָּׂא בְרָכָה מֵאֵת יְהוָה

He will lift up a blessing from YHWH,

(continued...)

⁷⁹¹(...continued)

וְצַדִּיקָה מֵאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעוֹ:

and righteousness from the God of his salvation / deliverance!

Hilmer adds “This is life as more than mere existence; it includes communion with [YHWH].” (P. 1249) See:

Psalm 63:4^{Heb} / **3**^{Eng}

כִּי־טוֹב חֲסֵדְךָ מִחַיִּים

Because Your steadfast-love is good / better than life,

שִׁפְתַי יִשְׁבְּחוּנֶךָ:

my lips will laud / praise You!

Psalm 73:27-28,

27 כִּי־הִנֵּה רְחַקִּיךָ יֵאָבְדוּ

Because look—those departing / far from You will perish;

הִצְמַתָּהּ כָּל־זוֹנֵה מִמֶּנִּי:

You annihilated / brought to an end everyone prostituting away from You!

28 וְאֲנִי קִרְבַּת אֱלֹהִים לִי־טוֹב

And I—nearness to God—to me (is) good;

שִׁתִּי בְּאֲדָנִי יְהוָה מִחְסֵי

I placed my refuge in the Lord of mine, YHWH,

לְסַפֵּר כָּל־מַלְאֲכֹתֶיךָ:

to declare all Your works!

Darr states that “Particularly significant is an inscription on the lintel of a door in the forecourt of the Edifu temple by Seshat, mistress of writing, to the God Horus:

I have come to You...

that I may set down in writing before You

the doer of good and the doer of evil, to wit:

he who initiates wrongfully

he (who enters) when uclean

he who speaks falsehood in Your house / temple

he who knows (to discern) right from wrong

he who is pure

he who is upright and walks in righteousness...

he who loves Your attendants exceedingly

he who receive bribes...

he who covets the property of Your temple

(continued...)

נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH.⁷⁹²

18:10⁷⁹³

⁷⁹¹(...continued)

he who is careful...

he who does not take rewards or the share of any man.

I write down good for the doer of good in Your city,

I reject the character of the evil doer...

[he who does righteousness] in Your house

[is] enduring forever,

but the sinner perishes everlastingly.

This inscription bears striking similarities in content with the lists in **Psalms 15; 24:3-6; Isaiah 33:14-16; and Ezekiel 18:5-9.**” (P. 148)

Matties asks, “Could it be that Ezekiel is actually modeling his list after the decalogue [ten commandments] with its ‘first table’ of laws relating to God, especially the first two commandments? He would thereby be calling for public recognition of the continuing validity of the covenant...as well as a renewal of piety expressed in a transformation of behavior befitting one who wishes to worship that God. Loyalty to Yahweh (cultically and ethically) will bring the reward of ‘life.’ Thus the legal lists enable the chapter to function as a sermon exhorting the people against all appearances to trust the sovereignty of Yahweh, to act responsibly, and to take part (in spite of judgment) in the reconstitution of the people of Israel...The legal lists in Ezekiel 18 have been drawn into the unique focus of the disputation—to call forth the new reality of a peoplehood committed to its covenant Lord. It is that goal to which the final traditional convention beckons—the call to conversion.” (Matties, **Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse**, p. 105; taken from Darr, pp. 148-149)

⁷⁹²

Ezekiel assures his readers that what he is saying did not originate with him; rather, it has come from YHWH’s Self-revelation.

⁷⁹³

Matties comments on **18:10-13** that “The second generation, which acts contrary to the example of the first, is framed by references to blood. Violence pervades this character description, more so than the first. **Verse 12** adds the phrase *poor and needy* (**Deuteronomy 15:11; 24:14; Jeremiah 22:1-16**), and uses the expression *commits abomination* (a common expression in **chapters 8 and 16**).” (P. 1180)

Darr states that “According to Ezekiel’s second hypothetical case, the righteous man begets a violent son (בֶּן־פְּרִיִץ, *ben paryits*), a shedder of blood (see also 16:38; 22:3, 27; 23:45; 33:24), who
(continued...)

וְהוֹלִיד בֶּן־פְּרִיץ שֹׁפֵךְ דָּם

And he gives birth (to) a violent son, who sheds blood,⁷⁹⁴

וְעָשָׂה אֶח מֵאַחַד מֵאֵלֶּה:

and he does, alas! from one from these (forbidden things);⁷⁹⁵

18:11⁷⁹⁶ וְהוּא אֶת־כָּל־אֵלֶּה לֹא עָשָׂה

and he—all these things he (his father) did not do—

כִּי גַם אֶל־הַהָרִים אָכַל

because also to / upon the mountains he ate,

וְאֶת־אִשְׁתׁ רֵעֵהוּ טָמְאָה:

and his neighbor's wife he defiled;

⁷⁹³(...continued)

engages in activities not committed by his father. In this second list, the prophet transforms negative ordinances into positive ones and vice versa in order to present the son as the antithesis of his father.” (P. 149)

⁷⁹⁴

Rabbi Fisch's translation has “a robber, a shedder of blood,” but he comments that “The meaning of the Hebrew noun *parits* is ‘one who breaks through’ the lawful bounds, a man of violence.” (P. 110)

Hilmer states that the violent son is the “evil, second generation. About half (eight) of the previous commandments follow, but in a different order.” (P. 1249)

⁷⁹⁵

Rabbi Fisch states that this means “any of the sins, such as robbery, etc., from which the father refrained. If the son committed one of these crimes, he would not be forgiven because of the righteousness of his father, but would perish in his own sin.” (P. 110) But Ezekiel, rather than being content with having already mentioned these crimes, goes on to mention them again, and then again, perhaps thinking his readers will learn by repetition!

⁷⁹⁶

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The son's life was in every respect the reverse of his father's.” (P. 110)

18:12 עֲנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן הַזֶּה

An afflicted poor person and a person in want he oppressed;⁷⁹⁷

גִּזְלוֹת גָּזַל

plunder / spoil he tore away;

חֶבֶל לֹא יָשִׁיב

a pledge he did not return;

וְאֶל-הַגְּלוּלִים נִשָּׂא עֵינָיו

and to the idols / blocks of wood he lifted up his eyes;

תּוֹעֵבָה עָשָׂה:

an abomination he did / practiced!

18:13 בְּנִשְׁךְ נָתַן וְתִרְבִּית לָקַח

At the interest he gave / loaned, and increase he received;

וְחַי

and shall he live?⁷⁹⁸

797

Rabbi Fisch notes that “In their poverty they could not buy the protection of judges and rulers and so became easy victims of exploitation.” (P. 110)

798

There is no indication of this line being an interrogative, but all of our English translations make it such, as we do. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has οὗτος ζωῆ οὐ ζήσεται, “this one in / by life shall not live.”

Rabbi Fisch asks, “Should such a wicked man escape retribution because of the righteousness of his father?...For such crimes as murder, idolatry and adultery, in accordance with the laws stated in **Numbers 35:16**, **Deuteronomy 17:5** and **Leviticus 20:10** (shall surely be put to death).” (P. 110)

(continued...)

לֹא יִחְיֶה

he shall surely not live!

אֵת כָּל־הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה

All of these abominations he did—

⁷⁹⁸(...continued)

Numbers 35:16,

וְאִם־בְּכֵלִי בְרוֹזָל הִכָּהוּ

And if he struck him with an iron instrument / weapon

וַיָּמָת

and he died,

רָצַח הוּא

he (is) a murderer.

מוֹת יוֹמָת הָרָצָח:

The murderer shall certainly be put to death!

Deuteronomy 17:5

וְהוֹצֵאתָ אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַהוּא אֹו אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה הַהוּא

And you shall bring forth that man or that woman

אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַרָע הַזֶּה אֶל־שַׁעְרֶיךָ

who did this evil matter to your gates—

אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֹו אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה

the man or the woman—

וּסְקַלְתֶּם בְּאֲבָנִים

and you shall stone them with the stones,

וַיָּמָתוּ:

and they shall die!

Leviticus 20:10,

כִּי־אִישׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקְלַל אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ

Because any man who will curse his father and his mother

מוֹת יוֹמָת

he shall surely be put to death.

אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ קָלַל

His father and his mother he cursed;

דָּמִיו בּוֹ:

his blood is on him.

מוֹת יוֹמָת

he shall surely die!

דָּמָיו בּוֹ יִהְיֶה:

His blood will be upon him!⁷⁹⁹

799

Rabbi Fisch notes that “He brought death upon himself by his deeds; but only upon himself, not upon his children.” (P. 111)

Hilmer states that “He is held responsible for his own sin.” (P. 1249) See **Leviticus 20:9**,

כִּי־אִישׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקְלַל אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ

Because any man who will curse his father and his mother,

מוֹת יוֹמָת

he shall surely be put to death

אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ קָלַל

His father and his mother he cursed;

דָּמָיו בּוֹ:

his blood is on him.

Leviticus 20:11-12,

11 וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ אָבִיו

And a man who will lie down (for sexual intercourse) with his father’s wife,

עֲרוֹת אָבִיו גִּלָּה

he uncovered his father’s nakedness;

מוֹת־יוֹמָתוֹ

they shall surely be put to death, (the) two of them;

דָּמֵיהֶם בָּם:

their blood is on them.

12 וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־כַּלְתּוֹ

And a man who will lie down (for sexual intercourse) with his daughter-in-law,

מוֹת יוֹמָתוֹ שְׁנֵיהֶם

they shall surely be put to death, (the) two of them.

תִּבְלַעַם עָשׂוּ

They have made confusion;

(continued...)

⁷⁹⁹(...continued)

דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם:

their blood is on them.

Leviticus 20:16,

וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרַב אֶל-כָּל-בְּהֵמָה

And a woman who will draw near to any animal

לְרִבְעָה אֹתָהּ

for crouching (sexually) with it

וְהִרְגֹתָ אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה

and you (singular) shall kill the woman and the animal.

מוֹת יוּמָתוּ

They shall surely be put to death

דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם:

Their blood is upon them.

Leviticus 20:27,

וְאִישׁ אִוְ-אִשָּׁה כִּי-יְהִיָּה בָהֶם אוֹב

And a man, or a woman that will be among them a communicator with the dead,

אוֹ יִדְעֵנִי

or one intimate with the unseen world,

מוֹת יוּמָתוּ

they shall surely be put to death;

בְּאֶבֶן יִרְגְּמוּ אֹתָם

with the stone(s) they shall stone them.

דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם:

Their blood is upon them.

Darr states that “**Verse 13** contains no counterpart to the verdict, ‘he is righteous,’ in **verse 9b** (one might expect ‘he is wicked.’ But the death sentence, ‘He shall not live,’ is the opposite of ‘he shall surely live’ in **verse 9b**. The following formula, ‘he shall surely die,’ appears numerous times within pentateuchal legal texts (see especially **Exodus 19:12-13**, where both ‘he shall not live’ and ‘he shall surely die’ appear). A third form of the death sentence, ‘his blood shall be upon him,’ echoes **Leviticus 20:9-27**. This declaratory formula originally functioned to absolve executioners of blood guilt in capital cases. Ezekiel adapts it in service of his thesis: A wicked person is executed as a consequence of his or her own sin only.” (P. 149)

(continued...)

⁷⁹⁹(...continued)

Eichrodt comments that “Now the cultless [no temple, no altar, no animal sacrifices] congregation of exiles find themselves confronted with either life or death according to whether they obey or disobey the ordinances of the community, in a statement backed by the solemn phraseology of the temple *torah*: ‘he shall surely live’ applies to the righteous man of **verses 9 and 17**; ‘he shall surely die’ applies to the evildoer of **verse 13**...

“What originally had a meaning only within the temple community and among the people of [YHWH] when still living in the promised land is here boldly transferred to the remnants of that people, languishing in the unclean land of Babylonia, a wretched set of displaced persons who are suffering chastisement at the hands of a wrathful God. There is a solemn public proclamation that now the old cultic community has been dissolved [and] a new community is in process of being formed by [YHWH’s] grace, and that the same promises are valid for it as for the old. Yahweh now opens to those who have fallen victims to death the possibility of new life. The exiles feel that they are under the wrath of [YHWH], and in helpless rage can only slander His decision as unjust, or else, as we see from **33:10** and **37:11**, in complete despair accept as their inevitable lot death in a foreign land...

“Now, however, they have displayed to them a significant possibility of life. It consists in the fact that the ancient destiny of guilt, laid on them by their fathers and delivering them over to death, has been annulled by Yahweh and replaced by a new offer of grace. Here and now in this heathen land everyone who believes the word of the prophet is given room and freedom to break out of the collective guilt of past generations to a new beginning which puts him into a personal relationship of service and loyalty to the God of his fathers...

“This is nothing less than the breaking of that iron ring of collective guilt with which all hopes die, and the opening of the road to freedom, along which the individual, stirred by [YHWH’s] Word with its summons to decision, may be brought into a new association with [YHWH] and with his fellow men...

“All the material guarantees, such as the temple and the kingship, the absence of which from the life of the people of [YHWH] has hitherto been inconceivable, have now lapsed. It is the community-norm of the law which is capable of being translated into life in every situation and in every period, and guarantees life and a future, because it is no mere set of outward statutes, but an expression of a moral will of [YHWH] which shapes history.

“This is not an expression of extreme individualism, as if the collectivism of former days were to be dissolved through the operations of pure individualists, without concern for the community and striving solely after complete self-expression. The community, formed by putting into practical effect the Divine standard for life, bridges the opposition between individualism and collectivism. Each individual self has become a germinating cell for that purpose through his personal encounter with [YHWH], and that encounter also admits him to a new fellowship with his fellow man. Ezekiel
(continued...)

18:14⁸⁰⁰ וְהֵנָּה הוֹלִיד בֶּן

And look—he gave birth to a son;

וַיִּרְא אֶת-כָּל-חַטָּאת אָבִיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

and he saw all the sins of his father, which he did;

וַיִּרְאָה וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה כְהֵן:

and he was afraid, and did not do like them.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹(...continued)

addresses individuals for whom exile has severed all ties by the name of ‘house of Israel’ (**verses 25-31**), a weighty title, full of meaning. This presents a strong contrast to the other name, ‘house of rebellion,’ by which he had formerly called them and makes it clear that they are destined to reproduce in a new form the old covenant community.” (Pp. 240-41)

⁸⁰⁰

Hilmer comments that here a righteous son is depicted, a “third generation. Twelve commandments follow.” (P. 1249) Matties comments that “The third panel seals the refutation by emphasizing that this grandchild studiously observes and rejects the father’s way and, by imitating the grand-parent’s way, he secures his own life and is not bound by the consequences of his father.” (P. 1180)

Darr states that “**Verse 14** introduces Ezekiel’s third hypothetical case: This man has a son who sees his father’s sins, takes thought (see **Ecclesiastes 7:14**), and does not repeat them...The grandson’s case does not conclude with the declaratory formula ‘he is righteous’ (compare **verse 9b**), but the verdict of acquittal, ‘he shall surely live,’ does appear (**verse 17b**). **Verse 18** harks back to the case of his sinful father: On account of his sins—extortion (see **Deuteronomy 24:14-25; Malachi 3:5**), robbery, and ‘not good’ deeds against his community—he shall die...

“Critics observe that only with the appearance of this third case does Ezekiel create a scenario germane to the saying in **verse 2**: the son does not suffer for the sins of his backsliding father.” (P. 149)

⁸⁰¹

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Reflecting upon his father’s conduct, he appreciates that it is evil and decides to shun that way of life...As the pious kings Hezekiah and Josiah did not follow in the sinful ways of their predecessors.” (P. 111)

And again Ezekiel repeats the list of offenses.

18:15 עַל־הַהָרִים לֹא אָכַל

Upon the mountains he did not eat;

וְעֵינָיו לֹא נָשָׂא אֶל־גִּלּוּלֵי בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל

and his eyes he did not lift up to (the) idols of Israel's house / temple;

אֶת־אִשְׁת רֵעֵהוּ לֹא טָמְא:

his neighbor's wife he did not defile.

18:16 וְאִישׁ לֹא הוֹנָה

And a man / person he did not oppress;

חֶבֶל לֹא חָבַל

a pledge he did not demand,

וּגְזֵלָה לֹא גָזַל

and plunder / spoil he did not tear away;

לְחֶמוֹ לְרֵעֵב נָתַן

his bread / food to a hungry person he gave,

וְעָרוֹם כִּסָּה־בְגָד:

and a naked person he covered (with) a garment.

18:17 מֵעֲנֵי הַשֵּׁיב יָדוֹ

From an afflicted poor person he withdrew his hand;

נֶשֶׁךְ וְתַרְבִּית לֹא לָקַח

interest and increase he did not take.

מִשְׁפָּטַי עָשָׂה בְּחֻקוֹתַי הֵלְךְ

My judicial decisions / justice he did; in / by My statutes he walked.

הוּא לֹא יָמוּת בְּעוֹן אָבִיו

He will not die in / for the iniquity of his father.

חַיָּה יִחְיֶה:

He shall surely live!

18:18 אָבִיו כִּי־עָשָׂק עָשָׂק

His father, because he truly oppressed,

גָּזַל גָּזַל אֶחָ

he tore away (the) plunder / spoil of a brother,⁸⁰²

וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא־טוֹב

and that which is not good

עָשָׂה בְּתוֹךְ עַמּוֹ

he did in the midst of his people;⁸⁰³

וַהֲגִידָה מָת בְּעוֹנוֹ:

and look—he died in / by his iniquity!⁸⁰⁴

18:19⁸⁰⁵

802

Rabbi Fisch states that this means “a fellow-Israelite, as in **Leviticus 25:35.**” (P. 111) See the quotation of this passage in footnote 632.

803

Rabbi Fisch states that the phrase, “among [our ‘in the midst of’] his people,” may be a parallel to *brother*. “Kimchi understands it as ‘publicly’; he committed his crime openly without consideration for public opinion.” (P. 111)

804

Rabbi Fisch comments that “He, and not his righteous son, suffers the penalty.” (P. 111)

805

Reimer entitles **verses 19-29** “Two Objections.” He comments that “The words ‘yet you say’ (**verses 19, 25**) introduce two objections from Ezekiel’s exilic audience. Again, ‘you’ is plural. Another edition of this teaching appears in **33:10-20.**” (P. 1524)

(continued...)

וַאֲמַרְתֶּם מַדּוּעַ לֹא־נִשָּׂא הַבֶּן בְּעֲוֹן הָאָב

And you say, For what reason shall not the son bear the iniquity of the father?⁸⁰⁶

וְהַבֶּן מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה עָשָׂה

And the son—justice and righteousness he did;

אֵת כָּל־חֻקֹּתַי שָׁמַר וַיַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם

all My statutes he observed, and he did them--

⁸⁰⁵(...continued)

He explains that the first objection is found in **verses 19-24**, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ Ezekiel anticipates his audience clinging to their traditional understanding encapsulated in the now defunct proverb (**verses 1-2**)...”

The second objection is found in **verses 25-29**, “The way of the Lord [אֲדֹנָי] is not just.” Reimer states, “The second objection, repeated in **verses 25** and **29**, appears to be oriented to the immediately preceding teaching on repentance, rather than being a second objection to the main teaching of the chapter. ‘Just’ (Hebrew root תָּכַן, **takhan**, **verses 25, 29**) has the sense of ‘weighed’ or ‘measured,’ that is, in conformity to a standard (compare **1 Samuel 2:3** [‘by YHWH actions are weighed’]). The irony of this objection is rich, coming from people whose lives have not accorded with justice.” (P. 1524)

Darr comments that “The questions posed in **verse 19a** constitutes the second of three quotations attributed by Ezekiel to his audience. With it the exiles challenge, or are said to challenge, the judgment rendered in his third case: ‘Yet you say, Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of his father?’ How can Ezekiel contradict their proverb, when they are living examples of its truth? The prophet’s response is fourfold. First, he reiterates (in summary fashion and in the language of casuistic law) both the son’s positive behavior and his ‘sentence’ (‘he shall surely live’). Second, he repeats the judgment (‘the person who sins shall die’) first announced in **verse 4b**. Third, he again renounces the point of the people’s saying, ‘A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for he iniquity of a child.’ This declaration actually moves beyond the proverb’s truth claim, for it asserts that transgenerational retribution moves neither forward (from one generation to the succeeding one as in **verse 2**) nor backward (from the present generation to the preceding one; compare **Deuteronomy 24:16**). Fourth, he casts the principle of retribution using the terms ‘righteous(ness)’ and ‘wicked(ness)’; each individual / generation is judged on the basis of whether he or she belongs to one category or the other.” (Pp. 149-150)

806

Rabbi Fisch notes that this line is an expression of “the current belief that even the innocent son is punished for the sin of his father”—”stated and refuted by the prophet. The son, he stresses, is not affected by the evil deeds of his father.” (Pp. 111-12)

חַיֵּה יִחְיֶה:

he shall surely live!

18:20⁸⁰⁷ הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחַטָּאת הִיא תָמוּת

The innermost-being / person, the one sinning, he shall die;⁸⁰⁸

בֶּן לֹא־יִשָּׂא בְעֲוֹן הָאָב

a son shall not carry / lift up in the iniquity of the father;

וְאָב לֹא יִשָּׂא בְעֲוֹן הַבֵּן

and a father shall not carry / lift up in the iniquity of the son;

צְדָקַת הַצְּדִיק עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה

righteousness of the righteous person upon him will be,

וְרָשָׁעַת (רָשָׁע) [הָרָשָׁע] עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה:

and wickedness of the wicked person upon him will be.

18:21⁸⁰⁹

807

Reimer entitles **verses 20-24** “The soul who sins shall die.” He comments that **verses 21-24** explain this teaching in what might seem a surprising way for Ezekiel. **Verses 21-22** consider the wicked person who then repents and lives rightly before [YHWH]. **Verse 24** considers the opposite scenario. Sandwiched between these is the central declaration of [YHWH’s] ‘pleasure’ (**verse 23**) in repentance, and a denial that He has ‘any pleasure in the death of the wicked.’” (P. 1524)

808

Rabbi Fisch states that “This verse gives the clearest expression of the prophet’s doctrine with regard to the responsibility of the individual.” (P. 112)

809

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 21-29** “The Power of Penitence.” He states that “The doctrine of personal accountability is supported by the efficacy of repentance. No individual is punished for his sins after he has repented them; how much less should he be penalized for the sins of another.” (P. 112)

(continued...)

⁸⁰⁹(...continued)

Eichrodt entitles **verses 21-25^{Heb} / 29^{Eng}** “Change in the Life of the Individual.” He comments that “Fresh light is now thrown upon this personalism from another perspective when **verses 21-25** bring out the turning-point at which the life and destiny of each individual is decided. In the preceding passage we saw the breaking of the bonds of collective guilt. Here we see the individual man’s life freed from being fettered by the sum of all the deeds he has so far done, which keep him from turning round from the course he has once begun. We find a vigorous refusal that his behavior should be influenced by legalism, which tends to count up successful endeavors and imagines that a man’s moral condition can be accurately calculated from the sum of his deeds, good or evil. The central factor in the life of the individual is not the mechanical functioning of an impersonal moral order but openness to the personal Divine Lord, which leads to a personal relationship of service and loyalty...

“Thus even the man who has already gone a long way down the wrong road may be assured of Divine favor, if he responds to the prophet’s call and orders his life in accordance with the [YHWH]-given order of the covenant; whereas the man who has hitherto been endeavoring to observe the law strictly is not to put his trust in the series of good works pleasing to [YHWH] which he can display, as if that absolved him from all anxiety about [YHWH’s] decision. He, too, must be watchful and ready to respond to [YHWH’s] call. Where a failure to show such readiness makes him succumb in the hour of temptation, and misleads him into actions contrary to [YHWH] and serving only his own selfish ends, no former merits can avail to make up for his breach of faith.

“Who can deny that this appeal shows a deepened ethical understanding of the inward connection between all ethical decisions, and of how progress in the moral life can be made a real growth? The answer is that only those who no longer understand it as a call to decision and a warning against sloth and complacency at a turning-point in Israelite history, and regard it instead as a timeless piece of abstract doctrine, in which the casuistry of a legalistic ethic dissolves moral action into a series of separate efforts and thus atomizes the individual moral element, to assert free decision at each moment regardless of all former associations and habits...

“The promise of life which we meet in **Amos** is a clear antithesis to Priestly reassurances (**Amos 5:4, 6, 14** [Yes!]) and already transcends the guarantee of physical life in the sense of a long happy life, pointing to a new turning of Yahweh towards His people. Similarly, what is meant in **Jeremiah 27:12, 17; 38:2, 17** is no bare preservation of life, but acceptance into the near presence of Yahweh with all the resultant blessings. The promise of life made by Ezekiel therefore includes much more than an assurance of material life; it also includes being forgiven and blessed by Yahweh, and thus being taken out of the state of condemnation, in which the exiles feel themselves to be like men sentenced to be executed...

“Ezekiel sees with ever-increasing certainty that the judgment upon Jerusalem takes effect not only in punishing Israel, but also in making it possible for Yahweh to turn once more to His people...The exiles are at once given a fresh start in life in the service of Yahweh and His people in the present and a sure expectation of the eschatological blessings...

(continued...)

⁸⁰⁹(...continued)

“Only in this sense can we understand properly the way in which Yahweh twice emphatically expresses (**verses 23 and 32**) His intention of coming to the rescue. He is indeed explicitly concerned with the conversion of the wicked man, so that he can find his way through to life...It is the fulfilment of Yahweh’s return to those He seems to have rejected, first hinted at in **chapter 12**, and then emerging more and more clearly. He startles us by first confirming and then surpassing the old cultic promise of life, stating that it is the aim of His holy will to call the wicked back to life. All the shattering strokes of judgment which have hitherto formed the main substance of this prophet’s pronouncements now begin to seem [YHWH’s] action ‘with His left hand,’ whereas His real object was the creation of a new people of [YHWH]. Indeed, as [YHWH] turns to His people to ask whether it could be judged otherwise, He recalls His loving faithfulness displayed in the earlier days of Israel’s history, and how it should have led to their recognizing Him as the Lord Who preferred grace to judgment...

“Now these men, overwhelmed by the weight of [YHWH’s] retribution, see themselves met by a new offer of life at the very point at which they found nothing in front of them but death and despair, and thus at long last learn to know their Divine Deliverer and all the greatness of His mercy.” (Pp. 241-45)

Hilmer comments that “**Verses 1-20** indicate that the chain of inherited guilt can be broken, and **verses 21-29** teach that the power of guilt accumulated within a person’s life can be overcome.” (P. 1250) Yes!

Matties comments on **verses 21-24** that “Two individuals stand in contrast to each other (**verses 21, 24**). The wicked person who *turns* (repents) and practices justice and righteousness (**verse 21**; see also **verse 5**) experiences life. What counts is not past action, but one’s orientation in the present (**verse 22**)...The case of a formerly righteous person seals the argument by emphasizing that the present orientation is the only one that matters. The text affirms that neither wickedness nor goodness can be stored up and weighed against each other.” (P. 1180-81) Yes! This is grace taking the place of legalism!

Darr comments that “With **verse 21** Ezekiel takes up a second issue concerning Divine justice. If he has succeeded in convincing his audience that Yahweh does not act according to the principle of transgenerational retribution, then they are prepared to consider a related one: the idea of a ‘treasury of demerit or merit.’ The prophet repudiates this idea via two hypothetical cases...

“The first case legislates the fate of the wicked person (community, generation) who repents of (= turns away from) past sins, obeys God’s laws, and does ‘justice and righteousness.’ Such persons ‘shall surely live; they shall not die (see **verse 17**). The trove [a store of valuable or delightful things; here, a store of condemning things] of sin accumulated in the course of a lifetime (treasury of demerit) does not determine destiny; only one’s present disposition and behavior pertain. Past transgressions will not be ‘remembered.’ (The same God Who graciously ‘remembers’ the covenant with the wanton wife Jerusalem (**16:60**) here graciously states that the sins of those who turn back from them will not be remembered)...

(continued...)

וְהִרְשָׁע בְּכִי יָשׁוּב מִכָּל-חַטָּאתוֹ (חַטָּאתָיו) אֲשֶׁר הִפְעִיל

And the wicked person that turns around / repents from all his sins which he did,

וְשָׁמַר אֶת-כָּל-חֻקֹּתַי וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה

and observes all My statutes, and does justice and righteousness,⁸¹⁰

חַיָּה יִחְיֶה לֹא יָמוּת:

he shall surely live—he will not die!

⁸⁰⁹(...continued)

“The following rhetorical question (‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked...and not rather that they should turn from (repent of) their ways and live?’), with its intervening, emphatic signatory formula (‘says the Lord God’) seeks a positive response from the audience / reader. That response, Block observes, is what those seeking release from the bondage of fatalism and despondency need so desperately: ‘a new vision of God, a God Who is on the side of blessing and life, not on the side of the curse and death.’ (quoting Block, **Ezekiel 1-24**, p. 583)”

Yes, indeed! Why couldn’t we preachers have heard and understood that fact throughout our lives and ministries? People coming to hear our message need “a new vision of God, a God Who is on the side of blessing and life, not on the side of the curse and death”!

Yes, Ezekiel is a “Prophet of Doom.” And these chapters of his Scroll have been hard for us to read, with all their words of condemnation, and guilt and punishment. But gradually, and certainly, the message of Ezekiel changes from one of Doom to one of Hope—a message of unbelievable Divine Grace, a vision of a God Who is on the side of blessing and life! We saw that truth in the closing paragraph of **Ezekiel 16**, where YHWH forgives and remarries his unbelievably sinful wife. We will see it again and again, especially in Ezekiel’s “Valley of Dry Bones” (**chapter 37**) and in his depiction of the “River of Life,” flowing from the rebuilt temple into the Dead Sea, restoring it to life (**chapter 47**). The same YHWH Who left the temple is now seen returning to the new temple following the exile, and taking up residence in it once again, renaming Jerusalem “YHWH Is There!” And the “holy places” in the new temple (with its low walls, and no guards standing at its gates), are surrounded by kitchens, cooking and serving the worshipers with rich food, as the River of Life flows from the temple to the “deadest place on earth”!

810

Rabbi Fisch states that “The two stages of genuine repentance are defined: turning away from a sin committed and loyal obedience to the will of God. The essential elements of penitence, as taught in the **Torah** and by the Rabbis, are regret for past sins and a determination to avoid them in the future: remorse and amendment.” (P. 112)

18:22 כִּלְפִשְׁעָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לֹא יִזְכְּרוּ לוֹ

All his transgressions which he did will not be remembered to / for him,⁸¹¹

בְּצִדְקָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יִחְיֶה:

in / by his righteousness which he did, he shall live!

18:23 הֲחַפֵּץ אַחַפֵּץ מוֹת רָשָׁע

Shall I truly take delight (in the) death of a wicked person?⁸¹²

נֹאם אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH–

הֲלוֹא בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדְּרָכָיו וְחִיָּה:

and shall he not by his turning around / repentance from his ways and he shall live?⁸¹³

18:24 וּבְשׁוּב צְדִיק מִצְדָּקָתוֹ וְעָשָׂה עוֹל

And when a righteous person turns from his righteousness, and does injustice,

811

Rabbi Fisch notes that “As the effect of repentance, the sins are, so to speak, expunged by God from the man’s record and he suffers no penalty for their commission.” (P. 112)

812

Rabbi Fisch states that “God is the Judge of man and in that capacity cannot overlook misdeeds. But He is also a merciful and loving Father Who hopes for the amendment of His children so that it is not necessary for Him to punish them.” (P. 112)

We say, Be very careful when you attempt to say what YHWH can and cannot do. YHWH is the Giver of the *Torah*, but is not subject to it. If He wishes to overlook misdeeds, He can certainly do so. As the **Scroll of Job** teaches so powerfully, YHWH is not subject to human laws, such as the law of retribution. What do you think? Do you believe YHWH “cannot overlook misdeeds”?

813

Rabbi Fisch states that “The repentance of the wicked causes no change in the will of God, since His will had always been that man should live. The change in the fate of the individual is effected by his own change of heart which is subject to his will (Malbim).” (Pp. 112-13)

כָּל־הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הַרְשָׁע יַעֲשֶׂה וְיֵחֵי

like all the abominations which the wicked person did, shall he do (them) and
live?⁸¹⁴

814

For **New Testament** passages warning against those who knowingly and willingly turn away from righteousness, see the following passages, which are as harsh as anything in **Ezekiel**:

Hebrews 6:4-8,

- 4 Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας,
For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened,
γευσασμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου
who have tasted the heavenly gift,
καὶ μετόχους γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου
and have become partakers in the Holy Spirit,
5 καὶ καλὸν γευσασμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα
and have tasted the goodness of the word of God
δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος
and (the) powers of the coming age,
6 καὶ παραπεσόντας,
and (then) have fallen away,
πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν,
to restore them again to repentance,
ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ
since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm
καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.
and holding him up to contempt.
7 γῆ γὰρ ἢ πιούσα τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῆς ἐρχόμενον πολλακίς ὑετὸν
For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it,
καὶ τίκτουσα βοτάνην εὔθετον ἐκείνοις δι' οὓς καὶ γεωργεῖται,
and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated,
μεταλαμβάνει εὐλογίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ·
receives a blessing from God.
8 ἐκφέρουσα δὲ ἀκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους,
But if it bears thorns and thistles,
ἀδόκιμος καὶ κατάρως ἐγγύς,
it is worthless and near to being cursed,
ἥς τὸ τέλος εἰς καῦσιν.
and its end is to be burned.

(continued...)

⁸¹⁴(...continued)

Hebrews 10:26-31,

26 Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν

For if we are willingly sinning

μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας,

after the reception of the knowledge of the truth,

οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία,
there no longer remains a sacrifice on behalf of sins.

27 φοβερὰ δέ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως

But then a certain fearful expectation of judgment,

καὶ πυρὸς ζῆλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοὺς ὑπεναντίους.

and zealous fire, one about to devour the adversaries.

28 ἀθετήσας τις νόμον Μωϋσέως

Someone setting aside a law of Moses,

χωρὶς οἰκτιρμῶν ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει·

without compassions is put to death upon (the testimony) of two or three witnesses.

29 πόσῳ δοκεῖτε χεῖρονος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας

How much worse do you suppose he will be considered worthy of punishment,

ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας

the one who tramples upon the Son of the God,

καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἡγησάμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἡγιασθη,

and considers the blood of the covenant / testament / will by which he was set-apart, something
common,

καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας;

and insults / outrages the the Spirit of grace?

30 οἶδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα·

For we know the one saying:

ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις,

Vengeance / vindication is Mine / belongs to Me,

ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω.

I, I will repay.

καὶ πάλιν·

And again:

κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ.

(The) Lord will judge the people of His.

(And we ask, should we not call the author of the **Scroll of Hebrews** a “Prophet of Doom”?

These passages certainly sound like we should. But in fact, the author of **Hebrews** has surrounded these statements with depictions of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, Who invites the readers to come to the “Throne of Grace.” The author of **2 Peter 2:20-22** stands side by side with these passages from Hebrews:

(continued...)

כָּל־צְדָקָתוֹ (צְדָקָתוֹ) [צְדָקָתוֹ] אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לֹא תִזְכָּרְנָה

All his righteousnesses which he did will not be remembered,⁸¹⁵

בְּמַעֲלוֹ אֲשֶׁר־מַעַל

by his unfaithfulness which he did unfaithfully,

וּבַחַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־חָטָא

and by his sin by which he sinned,

בָּם יָמוּת:

by them he shall die!

⁸¹⁴(...continued)

- 20 εἰ γὰρ ἀποφυγόντες τὰ μιάσματα τοῦ κόσμου
For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world
ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,
through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
τούτοις δὲ πάλιν ἐμπλακέντες ἠττῶνται,
they are again entangled in them and overcome,
γέγονεν αὐτοῖς τὰ ἔσχατα χείρονα τῶν πρώτων.
the last state has become worse for them than the first.
- 21 κρεῖττον γὰρ ἦν αὐτοῖς μὴ ἐπεγνωκέναι τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς δικαιοσύνης
For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness
ἢ ἐπιγνοῦσιν ὑποστρέψαι ἐκ τῆς παραδοθείσης αὐτοῖς ἀγίας ἐντολῆς.
than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.
- 22 συμβέβηκεν αὐτοῖς τὸ τῆς ἀληθοῦς παροιμίας·
What the true proverb says has happened to them:
κύων ἐπιστρέψας ἐπὶ τὸ ἴδιον ἐξέραμα,
A dog having returned to its own vomit,
καὶ ὡς λουσαμένη εἰς κυλισμὸν βορβόρου.
and a sow, having washed herself, (returns) to wallowing in (the) mire.
(And we say, Well yes, Peter. But remember that Jesus Christ came to seek and to save those who smelled like vomiting dogs, as unclean as pigs wallowing in the mire!)

815

Rabbi Fisch states that “Just as the misdeeds of the repentant sinner are forgiven, so the former righteous acts of the wicked will not stand to his credit.” (P. 113)

18:25⁸¹⁶ וַאֲמַרְתֶּם לֹא יִתְכַן דְּרֶךְ אֲדֹנָי

And you (plural) said, It is not adjusted, my Lord's way!⁸¹⁷

שְׁמַעְנָא בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

Listen now, house of Israel,⁸¹⁸

הַדְּרֶכִי לֹא יִתְכַן

Is My way not estimated / adjusted?

816

Matties comments on **18:25-29** that “A second objection and response frames this unit concerning the justice of [YHWH]. The question arises starkly as this accusation charges [YHWH] with arbitrariness.” (P. 1181)

817

Translations of this first line of **verse 25** vary:

King James, “The way of the Lord is not equal.”

Tanakh, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” **New Revised Standard**, same;

New International, “The way of the Lord is not just.”

New Jerusalem, “What the Lord does is unjust.”

Rahlfs, οὐ κατευθύγει ἡ ὁδὸς κυρίου, “the way of (the) Lord does not go straight.”

Darnell, “It is not estimated / adjusted (to the standard), my Lord's way!”

Rabbi Fisch holds that this means “His [the Lord's] manner of ruling the universe is inconsistent.” (P. 113)

818

Ezekiel is addressing the whole house of Israel, not the lone individual—just as his 2nd person plural “you” throughout the chapter has shown. Each individual is responsible for his individual actions; but each individual is part of a corporate body, which is likewise responsible, as Ezekiel's message emphasizes again and again.

Eichrodt states that “[YHWH's] new creation shows its greatness by being poured out over righteous and unrighteous alike, and summoning them to decide in the face of His offer of salvation...That is indeed the position of all who hear the word of the prophet; they are called to take part in a resurgence, made possible by the general amnesty declared by [YHWH] for the sins of past and present generations. Only the person who here and now finds himself able to turn back from his previous course and join the new people which is to wait for [YHWH's] final act of salvation can have a share in the future of the new Israel.” (P. 46)

הֲלֹא דְרִכְיִכֶם לֹא יִתְכַנּוּ:

Are not your (plural) ways not estimated / adjusted?⁸¹⁹

18:26⁸²⁰ בְּשׁוּב־צְדִיק מִצְדִּיקְתּוֹ

When turning back / repenting, a righteous person from his righteousness,

וַעֲשֵׂה עוֹל וּמַת עֲלֵיהֶם

and he does injustice, and dies over / because of them,⁸²¹

בְּעוֹלוֹ אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יָמוּת:

in / by his injustice which he did he will die.⁸²²

819

Rabbi Fisch comments that “It seems that the doctrine taught by the prophet gave rise to the criticism: if man is free to change his way of life from wickedness to righteousness and *vice versa*, this implies a change in the attitude of God towards man and so points to a defect in His nature...

“To this reasoning the prophet replies that it is not God Who makes the change but man himself. God always bestows His blessing upon man, but it is for him to be worthy of receiving it. As rain cannot fertilize the soil unless it has been cultivated, so man can only benefit from God’s benevolence when he has retained his moral capacity for its reception (Malbim).” (P. 113)

820

Hilmer states that “**Verses 26-29** repeat the argument developed in **verses 21-25**.” (P. 1250)

821

Rabbi Fisch states that “The apostate will die for two sins: he abandons the righteousness of the past and commits iniquity in the present.” (P. 113)

822

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The change in his fate is the sequel of a change in his conduct and not brought about by a change in Divine dispensation.” (Pp. 113-14) We wonder what the Jewish rabbi means by “a change in Divine dispensation.” Does he mean the Divine manner of dealing with individuals?

The definition of “dispensation” is:

1. exemption from a rule or usual requirement: "although she was too young, she was given special dispensation to play two matches."

(continued...)

18:27 וּבְשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִרְשָׁעוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

And when repenting--a wicked person from his wickedness which he did--

וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה

and he did justice and righteousness--⁸²³

הוּא אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ יַחֲיֶה:

he will preserve alive his innermost-being / life!⁸²⁴

⁸²²(...continued)

synonyms: exemption, immunity, exception, exclusion, exoneration, freedom, release, relief, reprieve, remission, relaxation, absolution, impunity

2. permission to be exempted from the laws or observances of the Church: "he received papal dispensation to hold a number of benefices."
3. a system of order, government, or organization of a nation, community, etc., especially as existing at a particular time: "scholarship is conveyed to a wider audience than under the old dispensation."
synonyms: system, order, scheme, plan, arrangement, organization.
4. in Christian theology, a divinely ordained order prevailing at a particular period of history: "the Mosaic dispensation."
5. the action of distributing or supplying something: "regulations controlling dispensation of medications." synonyms: distribution, provision, providing, supply, supplying, issue, issuing,

And the problem is, oftentimes when the word "dispensation" is used, you do not know what the user means by it. It is a "slippery" word, easily taken in differing senses, and thereby leading to confusion rather than to understanding.

⁸²³

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "lawful and right," and he explains that "Things lawful are things which may be judged by the law-courts; things right are acts of righteousness, deeds of religious courage and of mercy of which God alone is Judge' (Barnes)." (P. 114)

What do you think? Do you agree with this?

⁸²⁴

Rabbi Fisch comments that "Likewise, should the wicked man regret his former iniquities and lead a righteous life, his escape from the fate which would have been his, if he had not repented, is the natural effect of his own cause." (P. 114)

18:28 וַיִּרְאֶה (וַיִּשׁוּב) [וַיִּשָׁב] מִכָּל־פְּשָׁעָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

And he feared,⁸²⁵ and he repented⁸²⁶ from all his transgressions which he did—

חַיּוֹ יִחְיֶה לֹא יָמוּת:

he shall surely live, he will not die!

18:29 וְאָמְרוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

And they will say—(in the) house of Israel—

לֹא יִתְּכֵן דֶּרֶךְ אֲדֹנָי

It is not estimated / adjusted, (the) way of my Lord!

הַדֶּרֶכַּי לֹא יִתְּכֵנוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

Are My ways not estimated / adjusted, house of Israel?

הֲלֹא דְרֹכֵיכֶם לֹא יִתְּכֵן:

Are not your ways not estimated / adjusted?⁸²⁷

825

Rabbi Fisch comments that “His amendment is due to his realization of the punishment involved in sin.” (P. 114) That is, it is Divine punishment for his sins that causes him to repent. What about Paul’s statement in **Romans 2:4** that God’s kindness leads to repentance? Is this a matter of either / or, or a matter of both / and? What about Paul’s statements in **2 Corinthians 7:9-10** that godly grief leads to repentance?

826

The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” וַיִּשׁוּב; and second, the *qere*, וַיִּשָׁב—simply a matter of correct spelling / pointing.

827

Eichrodt comments on **verses 25-29** that “Yet even among the exiles there are many who are not content with this Divine promise of a new order. Instead of welcoming it with joy, men go on obstinately maintaining the son’s inheritance of paternal guilt, whether out of unwillingness to surrender a weapon to use against the prophet’s call for repentance, or whether again because they are champions of traditional orthodoxy and feel that to repudiate the old dogma of retribution in so revolutionary a fashion constitutes a dangerous assault upon foundations which ought to stand firm. In face of this, the prophet is content simply to appeal to the sense of justice which must recognize the principle of retribution ‘the
(continued...)”

⁸²⁷(...continued)

person who has sinned must die' as a liberation. In solemnly insisting upon the full personal responsibility of every individual, he blocks every attempt to hide behind another's guilt in order to evade the Divine reckoning. In **verse 25** he goes over to the offensive. All criticisms of [YHWH's] ways of executing judgment come either from a general dissatisfaction with the ways in which He acts or else in particular from resistance against being made to change one's mind. He takes all these approaches and forces them to face the question whether their attitude, their 'way' or conduct, can stand up to thorough testing, or whether something still lies hidden, born of human desire to be in the right before [YHWH] and thus bearing from the start the mark of rebellion against the Divine order." (P. 245)

In our study of the Scroll of Job, we have concluded that Job's three friends are advocates of the doctrine of "retribution"—holding that Job is guilty of some hidden sin, which is the cause of all his losses and physical suffering. Job keeps denying that this is the case, and in the long run, is told by YHWH that he has spoken the truth, and his three friends have been mistaken. And we wonder, is Ezekiel fighting the same battle, against Israel's religious leaders (prophets and priests) who mistakenly hold to that same doctrine of retribution? YHWH's grace and forgiveness deny that doctrine! Do you agree? If not, why not?

828

Hilmer states that the "Therefore" begins a "concluding, summary oracle." (P. 1250)

Eichrodt entitles **verses 30-32** "Admonition to Conversion." He comments that "It is necessary to cleanse oneself of such a sin of rebellion in order to be fit to stand judgment. So the Divine offer of salvation closes with an impressive warning, to set oneself free, while the possibility is still open, from the sins of the past, and not to cut oneself off from that course by any new inclination to resist. Jeremiah was tireless in proclaiming the call to conversion as Yahweh's most fundamental demand. It must sound out clearly now, especially where human perversity is only too capable of trying to turn [YHWH's] gracious purposes into a snare by which to be entangled in fresh guilt. What is required now is not mere outward assent, but an inner reorientation, a revolution in one's whole intimate inward attitude towards [YHWH]..."

"That is shown by what is said about the new heart and the new spirit, and the necessary struggle to possess them...Here, just as in the **New Testament**, the imperative of the exhortation is a response to the indicative of [YHWH's] saving action; [YHWH's] gift of salvation does not leave a man alone, but calls upon him for a response to [YHWH's] offer, to enter upon the new potentiality of life that has been granted him..."

"[YHWH] has opened before the exiles a new door, leading out of certain death and into a new life. All, therefore, who claim to be of the house of Israel are to tread that path, because they are taken

(continued...)

⁸²⁸(...continued)

out of their old being by love, which keeps open the possibility of repentance for the victims of death and sets them on the way towards a new goal.” (Pp. 245-46)

Eichrodt concludes that “No reader of this chapter can resist the impression that at this point we have reached the climax of Ezekiel’s preaching of repentance, where it breaks through to the most concentrated summary of the Divine will to judge and to save which is the decisive factor for the present. First comes a ruthless uncompromising severity in the detection of guilt. Then, from **chapter 12** on, we see the God of the covenant turning once more to His people. Finally we come to see in judgment the means of a new creation. A new road into the future comes into view, illuminated by the unchanging faithfulness of [YHWH] as He makes His Own the people whom He has chosen...It is the same will of [YHWH] which is concerned to deliver the man who has been condemned to death. Moreover, in the departure for the objective of a new people of [YHWH], which Ezekiel is allowed to signify, there is already an indication of the road which must be traveled again and again...

“Here we see the possibility of rebuilding our common life on a fresh foundation which, while capable of manifold variations of detail, in its basic structure remains the same as the model which appeared in Israel. It is the confrontation of atomized human society with a Divine Governor, Whose will has power to shape history and is devoted to bringing men together in brotherly solidarity. Its unshakable foundation has been revealed in the norms of moral and social life, which in contrast to the cultural and economic conceptions of the ancient East, protect the Divine value of every human being, and, independently of the specific form taken by each national life, demonstrate the right course of action in any given situation...

“These norms present man with a task. It is not the external compulsion of law, but a direct appeal for a free decision to the conscience of the individual. He is asked to allow himself to be taken into a personal relationship of service and loyalty to the God Who removes man from the chain of guilt down the generations, and gives him a new start by forgiving him, and thus guaranteeing him a life and a future...

“In this perspective there is a potentiality for vigorous action in apparently hopeless situations, but it can only become active power where the personal encounter with the living God has become a reality; in other words, it presupposes a revelation which reveals the other-worldly roots of all true human fellowship and thus imparts to the labor of bringing it into effect all the calm and sureness of a river of inexhaustible power...

“In Israel that revelation was made through a series of ever new acts of [YHWH] in history, and through the interpretation of them by the mouth of the prophets. Their inner connection was always clearly present to the national consciousness and was an assurance of the abiding presence of [YHWH] with His people and of His immutable will to achieve His aim...

(continued...)

לְכֵן אִישׁ כְּדַרְכּוֹ אֲשַׁפֵּט אֶתְכֶם

Therefore each man / person, according to his ways, I will judge you,⁸²⁹

בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

house of Israel–

נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH–

⁸²⁸(...continued)

“In taking up, recapitulating and transcending that revelation, Jesus Christ was aware of the task which he had to perform. In his person and work he had to show for all ages how the **Old Testament** [YHWH] of the covenant turns to all mankind. Ezekiel found words to express the overcoming of the social crisis in Israel. What he said is taken up and included in Jesus’ redemptive work and transposed into [YHWH’s] offer of salvation to all mankind...

“The intimate connection it has with the salvation proclaimed in the **Old Testament** prophets helps to guard the **New Testament** message against a danger. It is prevented from confining the Divine economy of salvation to narrow limits–[YHWH] and the individual soul, or even [YHWH] and the Church, as if it had only an indirect relevance to fellowship between all mankind...

“When we take **Old Testament prophecy** as our point of departure, we keep the door open for a people of [YHWH] who recognize their solidarity with all mankind, who take the problems of human life seriously as questions to which they, too, must find an answer, and who cooperate in the common endeavor to solve those problems with all the additional power of the fellowship with [YHWH] which they have been given...

“In so doing they cannot afford to admire themselves in the mirror of their own self-satisfied superiority as if they alone possessed all the right solutions. They are still under strong tension with a future which alone will bring about a real change in the situation, just as the community of Ezekiel’s day knew it had not yet reached the goal, but knew itself to be on a journey from the present world into one to come. But the call of the Divine Commissioner, Who sets that people upon its march, also guarantees that the new age will break through in full in the end, and that the new form of life, at present only beginning to be realized, will reach its fulfilment.” (Pp. 246-249)

⁸²⁹

Hilmer notes Ezekiel’s emphasis on “each one,” and comments that “While the house of Israel as a whole was guilty, [YHWH’s] judgment would be just and individual.” (P. 1250)

שׁוּבוּ

Turn around / repent!⁸³⁰

וְהִשִּׁיבוּ מִכָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם

And cause to turn around / repent from all your transgressions!

וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְמַכְשׁוֹל עוֹן:

And it will not be for you (plural) for a stumbling-block of iniquity!⁸³¹

18:31⁸³² הִשְׁלִיכוּ מֵעַלְיֶכֶם אֶת־כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעְתֶּם בָּם

Throw away from upon you all your transgressions by which you transgressed!

וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה

And make for yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit!⁸³³

830

Hilmer notes that this call to repentance is Ezekiel's "second call to repentance (see **14:6** [for his first call to repentance]." (P. 1250)

831

Rabbi Fisch states that "Perhaps a more correct translation would be: 'so that iniquity be not a stumbling-block to you,' or 'so that (your transgression) be not a stumbling-block of iniquity to you.'" (9P. 114)

⁸³²Darr comments that "**Verse 31** is a call to *action*. God urges the exiles both to cast away their transgressions and to 'get themselves a new heart and a new spirit.' The latter is an astonishing challenge—unique to the **Scroll of Ezekiel** and, within that corpus, unique to this passage. In **11:19-20**, Yahweh promised to gift the exiles with 'one (or 'a new') heart' and a 'new spirit,' in order that they might henceforth obey God's statutes and ordinances. Here alone does the prophet assert that humans themselves have the capacity to acquire these qualities. 'Why will you die, O house of Israel?' the Lord asks / appeals. **Verse 32** reiterates the substance of **verse 23**. But what was there issued in the form of a question now becomes an impassioned declaration. Yahweh takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. 'Turn, then, and live!'" (P. 151)

833

Rabbi Fisch states that a new heart and a new spirit means "A firm resolve to lead a life of faithfulness and obedience to the law of God." (P. 114) What do you think? Can human beings create a new heart and a new spirit within themselves? Or can only God do that? We say, No one can accom

(continued...)

וְלִמָּה תִּמְתּוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And for what reason will you (plural) die,⁸³⁴ house of Israel?

18:32 כִּי לֹא אֶחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת

Because I will not be delighted when the dead person dies—⁸³⁵

⁸³³(...continued)

plish such a thing apart from Divine help—but we also say, God is ready and willing to help everyone who will make the decision to do so. What do you say?

Hilmer comments that “What had been promised unconditionally (**11:19; 36:26**) is here portrayed as attainable but not inevitable (compare the same tension between **Philippians 2:12** and **2:13**).” (P. 1250)

12 Ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου,
So then / therefore, my beloved,
καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε,
just as you have always obeyed,
μὴ ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον
not only as in my presence
ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου,
but rather now much more in my absence,
μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε·
with fear and trembling work out your own salvation,
13 θεὸς γὰρ ἐστίν
for it is God
ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν
who works in you,
καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας.
both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

We say, Yes, you do it—but realize that when you do, it is God Who is working in you! We can do it—but only by letting God work in us!

⁸³⁴

Rabbi Fisch states that it is not [YHWH's] wish that anyone should die; it is the inevitable consequence of their personal actions. (P. 115)

⁸³⁵

(continued...)

נאם אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH–

`Wy*x.wI) WbyviPh'w>

and cause to turn around / repent, and live!⁸³⁶

⁸³⁵(...continued)

Hilmer states that “**Verse 23** is echoed in this final, grand summary, called by some the most important message in the whole [**Scroll**] of **Ezekiel**.” (P. 1250)

What do you think? Do you think YHWH’s desire for life, not death, and Ezekiel’s call to repentance is “the most important message in **Ezekiel**?”

Rabbi Fisch quotes Lofthouse as remarking, “It is obvious that Ezekiel here passes by several considerations which would rise to our minds. He neglects the influences of heredity and environment, and of character. Children do suffer from their parents; a man’s past does condition his present. The problem is not for us so simple as for Ezekiel. But it must be remembered, first, that Ezekiel is opposing a definite error, and second, that he does not actually deny such influences; his argument is simply, ‘Where good is done, it cannot receive the punishment of evil’; and this is true.” (P. 115)

Do you agree with Lofthouse? Is it not the case that Jesus did good, throughout his life, but received the punishment of evil? And again, do you agree with Ezekiel, over against Paul? Wrestling with problems such as these will greatly improve your theological skills!

836

Matties comments that “In the end, [YHWH’s] desire is for the life of all (see also **verse 23**). Grounded in such a vision of Divine compassion, all are invited to share [YHWH’s] work of creating a new community that practices justice and righteousness.” (P. 1181)

Darr reflects on **chapter 18**, stating that “**Ezekiel 18** is a text worthy of the Author in Whose Name the prophet speaks. A masterpiece or rational argument, it confounds every attempt to ‘get around’ God to hide behind a kind of fatalism that discourages responsibility by whispering, ‘What’s the use?’ A testimony to courage, it dares to contradict a long-lived understanding of how God operates in the world, because at this critical moment, that understanding threatens to conceal, rather than reveal, Divine justice. A clarion call to liberation, it proclaims God’s freedom both to flout human expectations and to stand squarely on the side of life, and also human freedom to turn from wickedness, to choose life, and to get about the task of personal and communal transformation...Its contemporary relevance is stunning. No less than Ezekiel’s exilic audience, modern readers both resist its message and long to embrace it....

(continued...)

⁸³⁶(...continued)

“Just as God does not judge one generation for the sins of previous ones, so also Yahweh does not keep a ‘scorecard’ of wickedness or righteousness accumulated in the course of a single lifetime or generation. Life is not a baseball game, in which points scored over the course of nine innings are tallied to determine the winning team. Persons are judged not on the basis of past conduct, but on the choices they make about the orientation of their lives here and now. Jesus says as much when he forgives the sinful woman who, learning of his whereabouts, comes to him, washes his feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, and anoints them with her precious ointment. Though her sins were many, Jesus sends her forth pardoned and in peace (**Luke 7:36-50**). The very rich ruler, by contrast, can affirm that he has kept all God’s commandments from his youth. But when Jesus tells him that he must sell all of his possessions, give the money to the poor, and then follow him, he is saddened by the price of reorienting his life, even though his participation in God’s Kingdom is at stake (**Luke 18:8-25**).

“Humans have a choice, but they must choose. God is not apathetic about our choices and so discloses the Divine predilection for life. **Ezekiel 18:30-32** summons us all to elect life—a decision that begins with earnest repentance (turning away from our transgressions) and continues with the daily and active pursuit of a new heart and spirit. Paul echoes that challenge when, in his **Letter to the Philippians**, he enjoins them to ‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God Who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for His pleasure.’ (**Philippians 2:12-13**)” (Pp.151-153)

We close our notes on **Ezekiel 18** by quoting from **Mark 1:14-15**,

- ¹⁴ Μετὰ δὲ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννην,
But then after the arrest of the John,
ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν γαλιλαίαν,
the Jesus came into the Galilee,
κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ,
preaching / proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of the God,
- ¹⁵ Καὶ λέγων· ὅτι
and saying that
πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς,
The time has been fulfilled,
καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ·
ans the Kingdom of the God has drawn near.
μετανοεῖτε, καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.
Repent! And believe in the good news!

Do you see Jesus as the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s message of repentance? We certainly do. How else would you explain it?