

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Ezekiel 18:1-13, 31-32

New American Standard Bible

Sunday, August 16, 2015

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (also known as the *International Sunday School Lessons* [ISSL] and the *Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 16, 2015**, is from **Ezekiel 18:1-13, 31-32**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help teachers with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study or give as a handout to students in the bulletin-sized edition. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Ezekiel 18:1-13, 31-32

(Ezekiel 18:1) Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Anyone can claim to have received “the word of the LORD,” but we know Ezekiel received the word of the LORD because God fulfilled his predictions and that is

one way of determining if someone is a true prophet of God (see especially Deuteronomy 18:22; Jeremiah 28:9; Ezekiel 33:33). Ezekiel also taught what God had revealed in the Law of God: Ezekiel's words were consistent with the Holy Scriptures. He suffered for his faith and obedience, especially when he did symbolic acts that God wanted performed to demonstrate His coming judgment against Jerusalem. Ezekiel was God-centered in all he did. For these and other reasons, Jews and Christians accept the Book of Ezekiel as an authentic word of the LORD and included it in the Bible.

(Ezekiel 18:2) “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children’s teeth are set on edge’?”

This proverb or “wise saying” was used by the Judeans in Jerusalem and throughout Judah to put the blame on their parents or ancestors for the coming punishment of God that Micah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel predicted and promised if their listeners did not repent. Rather than repent of their sins, the rebellious house of Israel blamed God for being unfair. They claimed that their parents had sinned, not them. Perhaps this belief also relates to their parents not teaching them the laws of God and the meaning of true sin; therefore, they did not believe they had sinned or deserved punishment from God.

(Ezekiel 18:3) “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “you are surely not going to use this

proverb in Israel anymore.

God told the people through Ezekiel that they were no longer to quote this proverb and God explained the reason they were to stop using it. In summary, each person is responsible for their own obedience or disobedience to the law of God, and those who were under the threat of or suffering from the just punishment of God needed to repent and return to obeying God. God would punish only those who justly deserved punishment. Unhappily, many righteous people suffer because of the actions of unrighteous people; so, God must discipline the unrighteous people to give them the further opportunity to repent of their sins and live rightly.

(Ezekiel 18:4) “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

The life of every person is in the hands of God, and God said that the result of sin is death, spiritual death and sometimes physical death. Of course, everyone will die physically until Jesus Christ returns. Jeremiah and Jesus both died at the hands of sinners, and other prophets have too. We do not believe that Ezekiel died a martyr’s death for his faithful life and preaching. The person who continues to practice sin will die spiritually; they will be separated from God and the godly. If the sinner does not repent, they will be separated from God and the godly for eternity.

(Ezekiel 18:5) “But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness,

Ezekiel continued to declare the word of the LORD, and the LORD described a person that He considered righteous: one who is lawful according to God’s laws, just, and does right. The righteous person obeys the Law of God. A person’s behavior reveals his relationship with God. Jesus died so God could be both just and merciful when God forgives sinners who repent and return to obedience. He gives His Holy Spirit to help repentant sinners obey His laws and remain righteous. True obedience to God always flows from true faith in God, because believers are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

(Ezekiel 18:6) and does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period—

The Judeans had strayed so far from God that God commanded Ezekiel to give some examples of the sins they were committing and what behaviors they needed to change. Ezekiel described what a righteous, just, and right person would not do. Eating sacrifices and festival meals at a shrine to idols was forbidden by the laws of God, because people are to have no other gods than the true God, the LORD. A righteous person would not sin

against his neighbor, his neighbor's wife, or mistreat his own wife. God gave Ezekiel these examples, because the Judeans needed to be taught the right applications of God's laws.

(Ezekiel 18:7) if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

In addition to not oppressing others or finding ways to steal from others (sins that Amos, Micah, and Jeremiah also described), the law also required positive steps to help others (especially those with a variety of needs). Ezekiel described two types of sins: sins of commission and sins of omission. For example, rather than steal from a poor person, a righteous person would try to meet their needs if possible.

(Ezekiel 18:8) if he does not lend money on interest or take increase, if he keeps his hand from iniquity and executes true justice between man and man,

God's people were not to take interest from other people of God when they loaned money, but this law was often disregarded. Advance interest or profit is taking an amount of money from the amount loaned before the loaned money is given to the debtor; a righteous person would not do this. For example, a person may borrow 100 shekels, but only receive 90 shekels, because the

interest or profit is taken from the borrower in advance (before he begins making payments to repay the loan). These rules regarding interest were to help the poor and needy, and were not to be taken unfair advantage of by those conducting business who wanted interest free loans. Justice in law courts was often difficult to receive, unjust judges were common as Amos and Micah also pointed out and condemned.

(Ezekiel 18:9) if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous and will surely live,” declares the Lord GOD.

God did not and does not consider a person righteous who decides for themselves which of His laws to disregard and disobey or obey when it is in his selfish interest. Selective obedience is disobedience. A righteous person seeks to know all of God’s laws and how to apply them in every situation in order to live faithful to God because he loves and wants to please God, his Creator and Father. The Spirit of God indwelling believers makes faithful obedience and drawing closer to God possible.

(Ezekiel 18:10) “Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother

The Bible shows how it is possible for a perfectly righteous parent to have a child who chooses to be unrighteous in all of their ways; such a righteous parent

is not guilty for the behavior of their child. God does not blame the righteous and faithful parents if their child chooses to live a life of sinful disobedience to God. The Bible puts the blame where it belongs: on the child. For example, Adam and Eve did not sin because God was a bad Creator or Father.

(Ezekiel 18:11) (though he himself did not do any of these things), that is, he even eats at the mountain shrines, and defiles his neighbor's wife,

Today, as in the time of Ezekiel, we know that some children who were raised in Christian homes turn away from the God of the Bible and God's laws to follow the direction of their culture into immorality. As Ezekiel noted, sometimes these disobedient children repent and return to God, so they will live.

(Ezekiel 18:12) oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but lifts up his eyes to the idols and commits abomination,

When someone chooses to live a life of sinful disobedience to God, they have chosen to live self-centered and selfish lives. Selfishness motivates a person to oppress the poor and needy who are basically defenseless rather than help them. Selfishness motivates people to steal from others, and robbery is a violent form of stealing. Failure to return what has been given to

secure a loan could be considered nonviolent theft. Selfishness leads to idol worship with the intent that the idol has the power to serve the selfish ends of the worshiper – sometimes in immoral pleasure seeking. The Bible does not describe all of the detestable actions that someone who worships themselves instead of God can do, or the things that those who worship idols might lead them to do.

(Ezekiel 18:13) he lends money on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.

Some interest rates and a fair profit can be just and right, because without a profit someone in business cannot stay in business for very long and meet their financial needs and obligations. The Bible condemns injustice of any type and economic injustice can lead to the death of the oppressed from starvation or exposure to the elements of nature. For these and other reasons, the person who persists in living apart from God and God's ways will live apart from God forever. A self-centered or selfish person would not be happy in heaven with God and His holy ones where it would be impossible for them to have their selfish desires gratified.

(Ezekiel 18:31) “Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!

For why will you die, O house of Israel?

The LORD told His people to change, to stop practicing outward sins. He also commanded them to change inwardly, to change their heart and spirit from old ways to new ways of living from the inside out. Remember how Jesus preached about both inward and outward acts of the mind and body in His Sermon on the Mount. A new heart and spirit would involve a new attitude and motivation for behavior: a change from self-centered to God-centered thoughts and actions. To remain selfish and continue behaving from a self-centered intention will lead to spiritual death and an eternal separation from all that is just and right, so God asks sinners, “Why will you choose to remain a sinner and die?” Jesus described hell in greater detail.

(Ezekiel 18:32) “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

God does not want anyone to die. God does not enjoy seeing rebellious sinners die, as an ungodly tyrant would enjoy seeing those seeking justice die when he murders them. God wants everyone to live and God has provided the way for everyone to live, but only those who repent and faithfully obey God will live. Heaven would be ruined if one selfish or self-centered person were there demanding their own way contrary to the will of God and those who love God supremely. Ezekiel’s prophecies pointed to the coming Messiah, Jesus, who would come

and save His people from their sins and grant eternal life to all who followed Him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How do we know that Ezekiel was a true prophet of God?
2. What was the proverb that Ezekiel quoted? Why did some people quote that proverb?
3. What kind of death does the one who sins die?
4. How did Ezekiel describe or define a righteous person?
5. Give an example from your study of the Book of Ezekiel of a sin of commission and a sin of omission.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly
International Bible Lesson.

— © Copyright 2015 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission
Granted for Not for Profit Use.

