

Review

Ezekiel has been prophesying to the Jews in the Babylonian Captivity. Tonight, we pick up in chapter 18, when the Word of the Lord comes to him yet again.

18:1-3 Using This Proverb

Among the Jews, a certain saying had become popular:

Ezek. 18:2 ..."The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge"

This seems awfully strange to most, and proves to be quite confusing to many. What does it mean?

Before ripening, young grapes are very sour. And when you eat sour things, the enamel on your teeth is attacked. As a matter of fact, the enamel on your teeth can be dissolved by acid erosion from continual eating of tart or sour things like lemons and other citrus fruits. The sensitivity your teeth feel after eating such things is described as your teeth being "set on edge."

So, this proverb is saying that teeth are set on edge by sour grapes. But what is so ironic about the proverb is that it was the fathers eating the sour grapes, but their children were the ones whose teeth were set on edge.

What this meant to the Jews who liked to quote it was that they were suffering for what their fathers had done. They were claiming that the judgments befalling them was because of their fathers' sins, not their own. They were saying that God was holding their ancestors' actions against them.

This proverb was being used a lot in those days. So much so that God mentioned it to both Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and gave them the same message to preach, even though they were speaking to people more than 800 miles apart. To Jeremiah, God made a promise for the future:

Jer. 31:29-30 "In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on

edge."

Generational Curses

Because the people thought that they were being punished for the sins of their fathers, and not their own, God made sure to clarify for them that not only was this idea incorrect, it is also never the way He does things. He made certain that we understood this. But - as with nearly everything that God makes clear - man has clouded it again.

About a generation ago, a certain doctrine cropped up which has become a prevalent teaching in the Christian church today. It is a doctrine which could quote the same false proverb today. It is the idea called "generational curses."

The doctrine of generational curses teaches that many Christians are carrying around the condemnation of their ancestors' sin. Whether it was their parents, grandparents, or further back down the family tree, they are taught that the sin which these people committed in the past is currently causing them to be cursed.

They say, "Curses can follow a person, a race, or a nation for generations unless it is supernaturally broken." "They are the invisible block to healing, deliverance, or salvation." "...Curses take away the quality of life. They can bring failure, shame, sickness and even physical death."

How do you know if you have a generational curse? One of those who propagate this doctrine has provided us with a partial list: "Suspect the presence of a curse when circumstances are unchanged by prayer. Common manifestation of curses are as follows:

- Continual financial problems.
- Continual lack of prosperity.
- Chronic physical or mental illnesses.
- Premature death.
- Multiple or repetitive accidents or injuries, particularly of the same type.
- Chronic strife or arguments or problems with interpersonal relationships.
- Hereditary physical or emotional problems.

- Poor eating or sleeping habits in infants or children.
- Business failures, single or repeated.
- Inability to conceive children or multiple miscarriages."

Those who make such assertions also offer us their own all-important prayers that we must pray to bind and break these curses. Of course, they're not really prayers so much as confessional claims. More than one teacher of generational curses claims, "...Prayer does not break curses. Repentance and declaration of a break of the curse is what is required. Generational curses cannot be broken at all, until all sins of all ancestors and predecessors on all sides of all of ones' families (and that of their spouses) are confessed back to the families' origins..."

Apparently, if you never say, "this generational curse is hereby broken," then you will never be free from this lack of prosperity, continual difficulties with other people, etc. Fortunately, all we need to do to disprove this concept is to read Ezekiel chapter 18.

18:4 The Soul Who Sins Will Die

When believers in generational curses are challenged with having to biblically prove their doctrine, you will usually hear, "Even one of the Ten Commandments says, 'I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation...' (Ex. 20:5, NIV)."

At first glance, that seems pretty convincing, doesn't it? But even the NIV Hebrew Dictionary defines this word translated "punishing" ("aw-VONE") primarily as "sin, wickedness, iniquity." "Visiting the iniquity on the children" not "punishing the children."

In addition, it is vital to read the whole text in its context:

Ex. 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me

and keep My commandments."

Certainly we see that oftentimes the sins of fathers do become the sins of the sons:

- Isaac fell into the sin of his father Abraham.
- King Ahaziah sinned in the way of his father King Ahab.
- King Abijam sinned in the way of his father King Rehoboam.

And study after study shows that people are susceptible to fall into sinful addictions and behaviors that their parents committed. The psalmist wrote:

Psa. 106:6 We have sinned like our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly.

A son will often sin in the same manner as his father. And that is what God means by "visiting the iniquity of the father" down the generations. It is not punishment, it is the natural result of your sin habits being passed down to your children.

But even that isn't always the case, which we see as we continue on...

18:5-9 The Righteous Man Will Live

The Lord says that if a man is righteous, then he will live. The Israelites were complaining in their proverb that God was punishing them for their fathers' wickedness. But He responds that if they live righteously, then they will live. It's as simple as that.

18:10-13 The Righteous Man's Evil Son

If "generational curses" pass down the penalty for iniquity, then you would think that there would also be "generational blessings," right? Shouldn't the children of a righteous man always be righteous? Not necessarily. We see plenty of examples of unrighteous sons with righteous fathers. David's son Absalom was far from righteous. The prophet Samuel's sons were also wicked. What about Noah's son Ham?

God makes clear that a righteous man may have a son who is wicked. His sons actions won't result in a curse, for "he himself did not do any of these things" (Eze. 18:11).

And God says that this wicked son's blood will be upon his own head - the father will not suffer for his son's sin.

18:14-18 The Evil Man's Righteous Son

Now, this wicked son may have a son also. If "generational curses" were true, then this son would have no choice but to also be wicked, or at least to suffer for his father's sins, right? Wrong again. God says that a son may see all of his father's sins, but "not do likewise" (Ezek. 18:14).

This son is righteous, even though his dad is wicked. His father will die for his iniquity, but the righteous son will not be put to death for his father's sin.

This wasn't even a new teaching. Even the Law of God spelled it out as clear as possible:

Deut. 24:16 “Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

Had the Jews somehow missed that rule when Moses was reading it? Not at all. Remember King Am-ats-YAW of Judah? His father King Yo-AWSH had been assassinated by his servants.

2Chr. 25:3-4 Now it came about as soon as the kingdom was firmly in his grasp, that he killed his servants who had slain his father the king. However, he did not put their children to death, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, “Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, nor sons be put to death for fathers, but each shall be put to death for his own sin.”

The Law was known enough to be applied and quoted. They really had no excuse for repeating this false proverb.

18:19-20 Should We Bear Punishment For Our Father's Iniquity?

Of course, no one likes to be proven wrong. And so, when the Israelites heard the admonitions of Ezekiel, they would say, "Well, why not? Shouldn't the sons bear the punishment for their fathers' actions?"

What's so ridiculous is that this was the very thing they were complaining about suffering for themselves!

But God clarifies: Everyone is going to be judged for their own actions, not anybody else's.

18:21-23 When A Wicked Man Turns Righteous

God is so loving and merciful, that He also takes the time to point out that a wicked man doesn't have to continue living in his sin, which is going to lead to his death. He can always turn towards righteousness. After all, the Lord...

2Pet. 3:9 ...is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

God loves it when people turn away from wickedness!

18:24 When A Righteous Man Turns Wicked

The other - more solemn - scenario of someone changing directions is that of a righteous man who makes a U-turn into wickedness. Every righteous deed that he has done will be forgotten if he falls away.

This would certainly be unacceptable to Ezekiel's hearers. How could God just erase a man's righteous works, simply because he fell away later in life? After all, isn't that what we hear from Elvis fans? "He was saved early on. The drugs and occult that he got into later don't mean he won't be in heaven!"

And isn't that what we hear from the parents with rebellious sons and daughters? "Well, I know that little Billy gave his heart to Jesus when he was at Bible camp, back in the 2nd grade. The fact that he says he's an atheist now doesn't change that."

I beg to differ. I believe it changes everything. In fact, if falling away wasn't such a tragic thing among believers, then why are Christians warned about it in the New Testament?

1Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith...

Heb. 3:12-14 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the

living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end

It is clear from the whole Bible that righteous people can fall away into wickedness. But Ezekiel's hearers won't buy it...

18:25-29 Whose Way Is Right?

"You mean to tell me that I can live my whole life righteously, but if I fall away a month before I die, then it was all wasted and my righteousness will be forgotten? That's not fair! The way of the Lord is not right!"

But God's response to that is, "No, it is you who aren't right." We can argue with God our whole lives, but we're never going to change His ways. And if our ideas differ from His, then it's we who are wrong.

18:30-32 Repent And Live

Again, God makes the appeal for a U-turn from wickedness. "Look, everybody. If you're worried about dying, and about being judged, then apply this one principle: Repent."

They don't have to die, they can immediately turn from their wickedness if they so choose. God wants people to repent. He wants people to lead lives of righteousness.

Remember when Jesus came into the temple early one morning. He was sitting down, and teaching a crowd of people. But some scribes and Pharisees interrupted the lesson with a loud commotion. They were dragging along a woman.

John 8:4-5 they *said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"

Certainly, a wrathful God who enjoyed watching sinners die would have said, "Then what are you waiting for? Stone her now!" But instead, He silently drove the men away.

John 8:10-11 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”

The message to the wicked: Go and sin no more. Repent, and turn from your iniquity. That's what Mark said was...

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

That's why John the Baptist came on the scene, saying,

Matt. 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

And that's why Jesus preached,

Mark 1:15 ...“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

And that's why, when He sent His disciples in pairs to preach,

Mark 6:12 They went out and preached that men should repent.

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