

## Ezekiel 17

- We're studying Israel's excuses to Ezekiel and God for why they need not worry about coming judgment
  - So far we've studied five of the eight excuses in this section of Ezekiel's book
    - Each excuse has shown us how self-deceived the people of Israel had become
    - And it also gives us an opportunity to consider whether we use similar excuses at times for our own disobedience to God's word
    - It's our human (sin) nature to think that we can get away with sin, but Scripture reminds us that the Lord is aware
    - And He encourages us to serve Him obediently
  - So we want to understand the historical circumstances of Israel's excuses and the Lord's response so we can be better prepared to serve the Lord too
    - Tonight we move to excuse #6
    - This excuse like many of the others is only reflected in the text indirectly
    - We come to understand the excuse by noting what the Lord said in response
  - In the previous two chapters, Israel's excuse was that the Lord's covenant with Israel prevented Him from executing judgment so they need not fear
    - So the Lord's response was to review in detail all the sins of the previous generations which justified His judgment
    - But that recap generated a new excuse, which the Lord then addresses in chapter 17
    - That new excuse was that the Lord can't punish this generation for the sins of those past generations
- So this chapter is the Lord's response to that claim
  - And He opens with a parable

**Ezek. 17:1** Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

**Ezek. 17:2** “Son of man, propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel,

**Ezek. 17:3** saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “A great eagle with great wings, long pinions and a full plumage of many colors came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar.

**Ezek. 17:4** “He plucked off the topmost of its young twigs and brought it to a land of merchants; he set it in a city of traders.

**Ezek. 17:5** “He also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters; he set it like a willow.

**Ezek. 17:6** “Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and yielded shoots and sent out branches.

**Ezek. 17:7** “But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it.

**Ezek. 17:8** “It was planted in good soil beside abundant waters, that it might yield branches and bear fruit and become a splendid vine.”

**Ezek. 17:9** “Say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers – so that all its sprouting leaves wither? And neither by great strength nor by many people can it be raised from its roots again.

**Ezek. 17:10** “Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive? Will it not completely wither as soon as the east wind strikes it – wither on the beds where it grew?””

- The Lord tells Ezekiel to present Israel with a riddle and parable
  - The prophecy is a riddle because it’s meaning has to be decoded...it’s not obvious
    - And it’s parable as well because the story presents an allegory which is a message told through symbols
    - The riddle part challenges the intelligence of the listener, and in that way is designed to excite interest in learning the message
    - And the message holds the meaning of the prophecy
  - Combining a riddle with a parable obscures the meaning beyond the ability of the listener to make sense of the prophecy
    - Which in turn makes Ezekiel’s audience dependent on the Lord to explain the meaning
    - So in short, this form gets and holds their attention so that they might hear the message

- In vs.1-10, the Lord presents the riddle/parable and in the verses that follow He explains it
  - So we will simply observe this first section and let the Lord explain it to us
  - The story centers around eagles, trees and vines
- First, a singularly impressive eagle flies to the cedars of Lebanon
  - Today we think of Lebanon as a place distinct from Israel, but in Ezekiel's day Lebanon was another name for the northern region of Canaan
    - Lebanon was part of the land God gave to Israel and therefore Lebanon was another name for Israel
    - But when the Bible uses the name Lebanon, it's referring to the northernmost region of Israel, which was famous for the very tall cedar trees planted there
  - Today in Israel you can again find cedars in many places
    - But these trees were only planted during the last century following the deforestation of the Israel by the Ottoman Empire
    - So they aren't nearly as stately as the cedar forests of ancient Israel, which had grown up over several centuries
    - So Lebanon is a reference to the cedar forest of northern Israel
    - And in particular, calling Israel by the name Lebanon was a way of referring to the fruitfulness and grandeur of Israel
  - And then an impressive eagle plucks off tops of these trees and carries them to a land of merchants and traders
    - And the eagle also took some vine seeds from Lebanon planted it in a fertile well-watered area
    - As a result, that vine spouted with roots secure in the ground
    - And as the vine spread out, it's branches reached up toward the eagle that planted it
- Then in v.7 another somewhat less majestic eagle appears and the vine suddenly shifts its attention from the first eagle to the second

- The vine's branches grow upward toward the new eagle seeking for that second eagle to water it instead of the first
  - In v.8 we are reminded that the vine's desire for the second eagle to water it is unnecessary because it was already planted in a well-watered area
  - It's been fruitful in that place, and so there should be no need to seek for a new source of water
- So in vs.9-10 the Lord asks rhetorically wouldn't the owner of that vine respond by pulling it out of the ground so that it withers?
  - Because the vine did not respond faithfully to the one who planted it and nourished it, but instead went after another provider, it will be despised by its owner
  - So it will suffer the fate of being uprooted
  - And despite having great roots, it cannot survive at that point since it has been detached from the land
- Now we see the Lord interpreting the riddle/parable, and first Ezekiel interprets it historically and then makes a theological application

**Ezek. 17:11** Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

**Ezek. 17:12** "Say now to the rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things mean?' Say, 'Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon.

**Ezek. 17:13** 'He took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land,

**Ezek. 17:14** that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, but keeping his covenant that it might continue.

**Ezek. 17:15** 'But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?

**Ezek. 17:16** 'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die.

**Ezek. 17:17** 'Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives.

**Ezek. 17:18** 'Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and behold, he pledged his allegiance, yet did all these things; he shall not escape.'"

- The Lord now begins to assign meaning to the various characters and events

- Beginning with the first eagle, which represents the king of Babylon
  - When Scripture uses eagles symbolically, they typically represent leaders or powerful entities with authority from God
  - For example, in Exodus 19, God uses an eagle to represent how He escorted Israel out of Egypt
  - In this case, the Lord gives us the answer to the symbol, but He also gave it that answer to Israel earlier in a prophecy in the Law

**Deut. 28:47** “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;

**Deut. 28:48** therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

**Deut. 28:49** “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

**Deut. 28:50** a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

- Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, is the eagle and the tops of the trees of Lebanon represent the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem
  - So as Babylon came upon Israel like a hot wind from the east (see v.10), it carried off the king and court of Israel
  - In 597 BC the army invaded Jerusalem and took the Judea king, Jehoiachin, and all his senior advisors
  - This group was represented by the tops of the trees
- They were taken to Babylon, a place of traders and merchants
  - There are several references in the Old Testament to Babylon as a city of traders and merchants
  - And this same description continues into the New Testament, as the book of Revelation refers to Babylon in the same way
- Then in v.13, the Lord says Babylon took another king of the family of Judah, Zedekiah, and placed him in power over Jerusalem as their vassal
  - This is pictured by the seed planted in fertile soil from v.5

- Nebuchadnezzar expected this new king to be compliant to Babylon's wishes, since he owed his power to them
- They supported his rule and allowed him and the rest of the city's people to remain and survive on the condition that he obey
- In that sense, they were well-watered and could flourish in their place
- As Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah he entered into a covenant with the new king
  - A covenant is a life-long binding agreement where the penalty for breaking the agreement is always death
    - Men didn't enter into covenants without considerable forethought, because so much was on the line
    - In Zedekiah's case, the covenant stipulated that he obey Nebuchadnezzar in all things
    - And in response, Nebuchadnezzar pledged to provide and protect Judah from all enemies
  - Under the terms of that covenant, Zedekiah and Jerusalem flourished for a time
    - They remained in the land and left to live life without restraint
    - In v.14 the Lord says the key to the nation's prosperity under these circumstances was to remain subjected to Babylon
    - The nation should not try to exalt itself, that is seek to rebel against the Lord's appointed judgment
  - In that sense, Judah's roots were to remain planted in the land and it's branches were to reach upward to the eagle acknowledging it's authority
    - It's branches only turned up to the eagle
    - The vine itself did not grow upward but instead spread outward
    - This was a less-than-sincere acknowledgement of Babylon's authority
    - And historically, this is the record of time Zedekiah's ruling

- But in 588 BC, Zedekiah decided to break his covenant and rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon
  - Obviously, Zedekiah's knew his army couldn't possibly withstand another attack from Nebuchadnezzar, so he sought an ally
    - Zedekiah reached out to Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt, the enemy of Babylon, seeking assistance
    - Zedekiah's asked for horses and troops to defeat Nebuchadnezzar's army when he inevitably invaded again
    - That Pharaoh is the second strong eagle that the vine turned to for water despite already being well-watered already
  - Interestingly, we know that Ezekiel issued this prophecy around 592 BC, so he's telling Israel of Zedekiah's rebellion 3 years before it happened
    - But he also tells the people that this rebellion can't hope to succeed
    - In v.15 the Lord asks can someone break a covenant and survive?
  - The Lord says in v.16 that the king will die in the country that put him on the throne and whose covenant the king broke
    - Remember, that when a man entered into a covenant, he swore by the name of his God
    - So Zedekiah would have sworn by the name of the Lord
  - And so the Lord is now swearing through Ezekiel to hold that man accountable for breaking that covenant
    - Remember, he hadn't broken it yet, but the Lord knew that he was going to break it
    - So he says that though His people broke the covenant, Babylon would keep their part of the bargain
    - J. Vernon McGee said concerning this irony:

**"The interesting thing is that Nebuchadnezzar kept his side of the covenant. God's people broke the covenant, but the pagan nation kept their side of it. What a picture! In some churches you will find people still carrying their Bibles, but their hearts are far from God and you cannot believe what they say. On the other hand, there are businessmen who, although they are unsaved, are men of integrity."**

- In vs.17-18 the Lord says that the Pharaoh wasn't going to be able to save Zedekiah in the end
  - The Lord will ensure that Babylon succeeds in conquering Zedekiah
    - You can find an account of how this happens in Jeremiah 37
    - The city's third conquest by Babylon is pictured by the vine being pulled up by the roots
    - Zedekiah and the nation were going to be uprooted from the land and allowed to wither in captivity
  - Now remember, the nation was saying that they weren't going to see the destruction Ezekiel was predicting because they weren't responsible
    - Their forefathers may have done terrible things but this generation wasn't to blame
    - So here's the Lord showing the people that their current leadership is just as rebellious as prior generations
  - Breaking the covenant is reason enough for the Lord to put an end to Zedekiah and his rule
    - But even before that point, the king was guilty of repeating most of the sins of past generations
    - In 2Kings 24, you find the record of Babylon's three attacks against Jerusalem and the three kings he installed
    - At the end of that chapter, we hear about Zedekiah's installment

**2Kings 24:17 Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.**

**2Kings 24:18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.**

**2Kings 24:19 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.**

**2Kings 24:20 For through the anger of the LORD this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.**

- Notice we're told that during Zedekiah's short reign he repeated all the sins of the prior king, Jehoiachin

- And earlier in that chapter, we're told that Jehoiachin did everything *his* father, Jehoiaikim, had done
- And even earlier in that chapter we're told that Jehoiakim had shed the blood of the innocent, indicating child sacrifice
- So all three kings carried on the same abhorrent practices of earlier generations
- So the nation had no basis for claiming it was innocent of their forefathers' sins
  - On the contrary, they were just as guilty and just as deserving of judgment
    - So now the Lord makes a theological application in vs.

**Ezek. 17:19** Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head.

**Ezek. 17:20** "I will spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. Then I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there regarding the unfaithful act which he has committed against Me.

**Ezek. 17:21** "All the choice men in all his troops will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to every wind; and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken."

- The world would see Babylon's third defeat of Judah as simply another struggle between nations
  - And the result would make perfect sense to a student of the ancient East
  - When conquered nations resist the power of their conquerors, they will be crushed
  - Such was Judah's fate following their second rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar
- But now the Lord adds a theological interpretation to these same events for Israel's sake
  - The Lord would ensure that this final defeat would wipe Israel off the map for a while
  - The king will be captured and brought to Babylon where he will be judged personally

- We covered the way in which this king was killed back in chapter 12, where Ezekiel uses similar language of a snare to trap him
  - And when Nebuchadnezzar came face to face with Zedekiah, he decided to make an example of the man
  - Nebuchadnezzar killed the Zedekiah's son in his presence and then plucked out the king's eyes so that his last memory was seeing his son's dying
  - Nebuchadnezzar then left Zedekiah to live a blind man in Babylon
- The Lord says that when these things happen and the nation's army is vanquished and the survivors scattered abroad, Israel would know the Lord had indeed spoken to them
  - How could the Lord be sure that Israel would get this message?
    - Because He's told them about the outcome before it happens
    - Jeremiah told the inhabitants of Jerusalem while Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles in Babylon
    - Both groups heard of these events in advance, and when they came to pass exactly as the Lord promised, it made an impression
  - So at that point, the people remaining in exile gave heed to what the prophets said and to the meaning of these things
    - They recognized that the Lord had executed judgment against the people for their offenses against Him
    - And we know from history that the people then committed to never again pursuing idolatry
    - The memory of Babylon was so seared into the collective consciousness of the nation that they feared the Lord's response should they ever stray again
  - Of course, that doesn't mean the entire nation turned to Him in faith
    - There is a big difference between following the Law in obedience and following the Lord in faith
    - The Lord used the Babylonian captivity to return Israel to obedience to the Law

- And He uses obedience to the Law as a tutor to bring some to Messiah
- Still, the first priority was preserving the nation from idolatry so that it would serve the Lord's purpose in bringing the Messiah to the world
- But as we already know, the Lord has two messages for the people, one of judgment and one of glory
  - First comes judgment to address the rebellious hearts of the people in keeping with the Old Covenant's requirements
    - But later comes the promise of glory which is fulfilled solely on the basis of God's faithfulness to His covenant to Abraham
    - So once more, the Lord ends His promise of coming judgment with a promise of ultimate glory

**Ezek. 17:22** Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.

**Ezek. 17:23** "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.

**Ezek. 17:24** "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

- The Lord draws upon the same parable from earlier to extend a new message of glory to the people of Israel
  - He says He Himself will cut off a young, tender shoot of the very top of the loftiest cedar in Lebanon and set it up
    - This shoot would be planted on a high and lofty mountain
    - It will bear great fruit and provide shelter to many branches below it
    - Furthermore, birds of every kind will nest in it
  - Moreover, at that time all the rest of the trees in Israel will know that the Lord is the Lord of Israel

- And high trees will be humbled while the lowly trees will be exalted
- The green trees will dry up while the dry trees will flourish
- The Lord has spoken it and so He will do it
- The symbology is clear...as we learned earlier, the tops of these stately cedars represent the rulers of Israel
  - So planting a cutting from the top of the highest tree is an allusion to the return of the Davidic line and specifically the ruling Messiah
    - So the Lord is promising to install the Messiah as leader over Israel in a day to come
    - He will be the highest ruler over all Israel
    - And not just Israel, but birds of all kinds, meaning Gentile nations, would also nest under this tree
  - And under this coming ruler, all Israel will flourish and be protected
    - All Israel will be obedient and believing
    - And He will rule from the seat of David on Mt. Zion
  - Finally, the effect of Messiah ruling will be to humble the proud and to exalt the humble
    - Which is a very different arrangement from the way Israel worked in Ezekiel's day and in most days
    - The powerful and elite in the nation held the power and absurd it for their own sake and at the expense of the people
  - Obviously, this is exactly the opposite of what the Lord desired from those who ruled over His people
    - Consider that the Lord's favorite metaphor for a leader over His people is the shepherd
    - The Lord always wanted men who cared more for their flock than for themselves
    - And would be willing to sacrifice their own interests for those they care over

- Israel hasn't had that in a long time, and now the Lord is promising to bring that to Israel in the ultimate sense of Jesus
  - Jesus is the perfect representation of such a shepherd
    - Willing to lay His life down for the sake of the sheep
    - And when He returns to rule over Israel and the world, He will judge the nations with perfect righteousness
    - He will humble the proud
    - He will exalt the humble
  - When Isaiah speaks of day that the Lord enters into His Kingdom, he describes it this way

**Is. 2:10 Enter the rock and hide in the dust**

**From the terror of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty.**

**Is. 2:11 The proud look of man will be abased**

**And the loftiness of man will be humbled,  
And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.**

**Is. 2:12 For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning**

**Against everyone who is proud and lofty  
And against everyone who is lifted up,  
That he may be abased.**

**Is. 2:13 And it will be against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up,**

**Against all the oaks of Bashan,**

**Is. 2:14 Against all the lofty mountains,**

**Against all the hills that are lifted up,**

**Is. 2:15 Against every high tower,**

**Against every fortified wall,**

**Is. 2:16 Against all the ships of Tarshish**

**And against all the beautiful craft.**

**Is. 2:17 The pride of man will be humbled**

**And the loftiness of men will be abased;  
And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,**

**Is. 2:18 But the idols will completely vanish.**

- The Lord alone will be exalted but He will be against the proud

- Including the cedars of Lebanon referring to those proud and evil leaders over Israel
- Most importantly the idols in Israel will vanish
- So to review the chapter, the people were dismissing Ezekiel's warnings saying that they wouldn't be held liable for the sins of their fathers
  - And the Lord responds saying Israel will be held accountable for the sins of their own generation
    - He used the parable to explain that their present king was just as evil as previous kings
    - So the Lord says they will be held accountable predicting what will happen in three year's time
    - The king's plan to rebel will not succeed, the city will be taken, and the people will go into exile
  - But because of this prophecy, the people will know that the Lord was the One bringing these judgments
    - And because of the serenity of what happens, the people are willing to set aside idolatry forever
    - The combined effect is to draw Israel back to a faithful walk under the Law
    - Or at least they lost their desire to pursue pagan idols
    - And that zealotness continues for the most part today among the Jewish people
    - And in the Kingdom it will finally be put away forever
- Now in response to that prophecy, the people decide to double-down on their excuse?
  - After complaining that they were being punished for their father's sins, the Lord said their generation of leaders had sins too
    - But they basically ignore the Lord's response and continue insisting they were being punished for the sins of their fathers
    - So the Lord take the next chapter to specifically address that charge

- We won't do all of 18 tonight, but since these two chapters are so closely related, we are going to move into it a little

**Ezek. 18:1** Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

**Ezek. 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’?

**Ezek. 18:3** “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

**Ezek. 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.

**Ezek. 18:5** “But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness,

**Ezek. 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 –

**Ezek. 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,

**Ezek. 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,

**Ezek. 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.

- This chapter of Ezekiel is one of the more often studied for what it reveals about God’s justice
  - The Lord tells Ezekiel to rebuke the people with these words, beginning with a proverb Israel was telling itself
    - They were saying “the fathers eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge”
    - Eating sour grapes sets your teeth on edge, so to speak
    - So the proverb claimed that in Israel the children receive the consequences of the fathers’ poor choices
  - This proverb was a not-so-subtle indictment of God’s character
    - The proverb reflected the nation’s self-deception
    - They thought God treated them unfairly for the sin of others
    - While conveniently overlooking their own sins which justified the Lord’s wrath

- But the Lord denies the truth of this proverb beginning in v.3
  - He says as long as I live, the nation will no longer use this proverb
  - How long does God live? Eternally
  - So in other words, this proverb disappeared from Israel forever
- To set the record straight, the Lord says in v.4 that all souls are the Lord's: the soul of every father and the soul of every son are known
  - This is a powerful statement of God's sovereignty over the destiny of humanity
    - God is saying that every living person, every human being who has ever possessed a soul including unborn children, belong to Him
    - He knows them, He determines the course of their path in life and the outcome of their soul in the end
  - No one exists outside the Lord's view, which tells us that all will be accountable to Him too
    - None will escape His judgment in a day to come
    - And the Lord says that the one who sins will die
  - On the other hand, the one who is righteous and practices justice and righteousness according to the terms of the Law lives
    - The Lord gives examples of what the righteous would do or not do during these evil days
    - The righteous would not eat meat sacrificed to idols, pray to idols, commit adultery or violate other Laws regarding lying with women
    - Furthermore, the righteous don't oppress others, fail to repay debts
    - He doesn't rob others but gives to the needs of the poor, etc.
- In summary, the righteous man under the Law walks in those ordinances
  - In v.9 the Lord says walking in the statutes of the Law, which means obeying as much as possible, was dealing faithfully with the Lord

- Such a heart displays righteousness and that person will live
- In this context living or dying refers to physical death, the penalty for sin under the Old Covenant
  - That's the question at issue here...whether the Lord was justified in holding Israel accountable for their sins under that Covenant
  - The people said they were being unfairly treated because they were being put to death for the sins of their fathers
- The Lord defends Himself saying that every soul in Israel will be held responsible under that covenant for their own behavior
  - If they had a heart of obedience, they would not fall under the Law's penalty of death
  - If they sinned doing the very sorts of things he just listed, then they will die
- Moreover, there is no link between father and son...

**Ezek. 18:10** “Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother

**Ezek. 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,

**Ezek. 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,

**Ezek. 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.

**Ezek. 18:14** “Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father's sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise.

**Ezek. 18:15** “He 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,

**Ezek. 18:16** or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery, but he gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

**Ezek. 18:17** he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take interest or increase, but executes My ordinances, and walks in My statutes; he will not die for his father's iniquity, he will surely live.

**Ezek. 18:18** “As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity.

•

- The Lord lists examples of two different sons
  - In vs.10-13 the Lord lists the example of a righteous father who happens to have an unrighteous son
    - Unlike his father, that son does all the abominable things described earlier
    - As a result, he will be put to death as the Law required
    - No one would be able to say that this child was dying for his father's sins, for his father was righteous
    - His own blood was on his head
  - Godly parents should remember this example if they have concern for a wayward child
    - The Lord never hints at any link between the father and the child
    - In fact, the father's life is impeccable
    - And yet the child emerges with issues, and so the father is not accountable
    - We still wish for our prodigal children to do better, but we need not worry that we are responsible
- Conversely, in vs.14-18 the Lord lists the example of a son who has done what's righteous despite being raised by an unrighteous father
  - He walks in the Lord's ordinances and statutes and will live because of his obedience under the Law
    - Moreover, the Lord says in v.17 that he will not die for his father's sins
    - These are not new determinations by the Lord...this is always the way it had been
    - The Lord is simply reminding Israel of that fact to deny their silly proverb
  - Notice His summary in vs. 19-20

**Ezek. 18:19** “Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity?’ When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.

**Ezek. 18:20** “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

- He asks Israel why are you saying that I’m causing the son to bear the father’s iniquity?
- The evidence argued to the contrary...children who did the right thing were not punished under the Law
- Only the person who sinned was accountable
  - This is a basic principle of Scripture, and the Lord has never practiced it any other way on an individual basis
  - But there is a companion principle for the nation of Israel uniquely from the Law

**Deut. 5:7** ‘You shall have no other gods before Me.

**Deut. 5:8** ‘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.

**Deut. 5:9** ‘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, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

**Deut. 5:10** but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- In multiple places in the Law, the Lord declared to Israel that the nation must have no gods other than the Lord
  - And that if the nation violated this Law by entering into idolatry, then the Lord would react in jealousy
    - He doesn’t specify at this point how He would respond, except to say that His wrath would extend for generations
    - But later the Lord says in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel that the penalty for idolatry would be exile from the land

- Of course that exile lasted 3-4 generations, which is what the Lord was talking about in the Law
- So the Lord wasn't suggesting He would hold sons accountable for a father's sin
  - Rather He speaking about national penalties for national sins
  - Under the Old Covenant of Moses, there were laws for the individual Jew with penalties for disobedience
  - And there were expectations for the nation as a whole with penalties for the nation
- The covenant itself stipulated that the nation would experience these judgments for failure to keep its terms
  - In Leviticus the Lord spelled out the blessings for obedience and the consequences for failure to keep the covenant
  - And included in those consequences was the exile that Judah was now facing

**Lev. 26:14** 'But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments,  
**Lev. 26:15** if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant,  
**Lev. 26:16** I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

**Lev. 26:31** 'I will lay waste your cities as well and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your soothing aromas.

**Lev. 26:32** 'I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it.

**Lev. 26:33** 'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

**Lev. 26:36** 'As for those of you who may be left, I will also bring weakness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. And the sound of a driven leaf will chase them, and even when no one is pursuing they will flee as though from the sword, and they will fall.

**Lev. 26:37** 'They will therefore stumble over each other as if running from the sword, although no one is pursuing; and you will have no strength to stand up before your enemies.

**Lev. 26:38** 'But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you.

- These were part of the national consequences for failure to keep the covenant and they were separate for the consequences for individual sin
  - These two lines of consequence worked in conjunction with one another
    - The entire nation would experience the national consequences independent of how any given individual in the nation lived
    - So individually, each person (i.e., soul) would live or die depending on whether they obeyed this covenant's terms
    - And the nation would prosper or not depending on how it kept the covenant
    - And if the nation stumbled as a whole, then the consequences would extend for generations
  - Knowing these things, then we also understand that these verses do not directly speak to how the Lord deals with His Church
    - We are not under Law and therefore we are not treated according to these Laws
    - We are not held to the penalties of the Law in Deuteronomy or Leviticus
    - So we will not be sent into exile in Babylon, and our third and fourth generations will not be captives as a result, etc.
  - There is simply no direct comparison to be made except the obvious comparison that we too are called to live obediently
    - And we too will be judged individually by the Lord
    - He doesn't judge us according to our sin, since Christ has taken our sin on Himself
    - But he does judge us individually according to our works
    - Reason enough to deal faithfully with the Lord