**A Pernicious Proverb**

*Ezekiel 18*

**Introduction**

1. God’s revelation, and recorded actions consistently present the reality of personal accountability.
2. There is a challenge we face with this reality when we think about the effects that situations and other people outside of ourselves have had on us – for good or bad.
3. Satan tempts us to abandon responsibility for our own failures, placing blame on those who have gone before us. This masks the problem with dishonesty and slams the door of change and improvement shut.
4. There was a popular proverb among Israel that illustrates this mindset – **Ezekiel 18:1-2** – during Babylonian captivity, the people of God were playing the blame game, and taking no responsibility for their current situation before God.
   1. This proverb is extremely dangerous and damaging.
5. If any change is to come, and if salvation is available, it requires that we reject any notion that would exempt us from personal accountability and face the fact of our involvement in our own spiritual downfall. God offers a way out, but it is not through placing blame on others.
6. A Proverb in Israel and the Lord’s Response **(vv. 1-4)**
7. A Pernicious Proverb **(vv. 1-2)**
   1. A proverb commonly used among the Israelites – **cf. Jeremiah 31:29**
   2. **Illustrating the idea that following generations are negatively affected by the actions of those before them:**
      1. Sour grapes should affect the one who eats them.
      2. Yet the children’s teeth are set on edge when the father eats them.
   3. **The ultimate idea** – **(v. 19)** – not only bearing consequences, but guilt.
   4. The consequence:
      1. **Fatalistic mindset** – my ancestors’ actions have determined the outcome of my life – it is inevitable and immutable.
      2. **Abandonment of responsibility** – since I bear their guilt, I bear no guilt – nothing is my fault, and since my fate is sealed there is nothing I can be expected to do.
      3. **Hopeless despair** – I cannot change, and I cannot escape, and my view of God is depressed.
   5. The proverb’s pretext – **Exodus 20:5; 34:7** – the difference between God’s message and that of the proverb is immense.
      1. **Consequences** – succeeding generations do bear the consequences of those they follow. (Countless examples) (Same for captivity generations)
      2. **Guilt of sin** – though consequences of another’s sin may be borne, the Bible speaks nothing of the sin itself being accounted, or the guilt being transferred.
8. The Lord’s Rebuke and Correction **(vv. 3-4)**
   1. **Cf. Jeremiah 31:29** – prophetic future – followed with New Covenant prophecy.
   2. **(v. 3)** – God, through Ezekiel, is saying to put it to a stop now! – This is not true and is extremely damaging – as the current situation shows.
      1. **Things will not get better without taking personal responsibility**.
   3. **(v. 4)** – The message behind the proverb implies at the very least a different level of focus and concern by God upon generations of men.
      1. **God looks at each individual life with equal concern, love, attention, and judgment, yet in distinction from all others.**
      2. It follows that each life answers to God independently.
      3. **NOTE: This does not eliminate or ignore the obvious fact of community and environment. A life’s standing with God is independent, but that life’s circumstances may be affected by another life’s choices. This does not change the individual aspect of responsibility.**
9. Each Generation is Free from the Shadow of the Previous (**vv. 5-20**)
10. The three examples are not merely theoretical, but historical – Hezekiah (**2 Kings 18:3**), Manasseh (**2 Kings 21:2, 10-15**), Josiah (**2 Kings 22:2**)
11. A Righteous Man Shall Live **(vv. 5-9)**
    1. **Cf. Micah 6:8** – what God requires.
    2. **(vv. 5, 9)** – lawful, righteous, just toward man, merciful toward man.
    3. **Religious** – not served idols.
    4. **Moral** – sexual purity, ceremonial purity.
    5. **Civil** – not oppressed, not robbed, not exacted usury.
    6. **Positive, mercy** – given bread, clothed, executed true judgment.
    7. **He shall live!**
12. A Righteous Man’s Unrighteous Son Shall Die **(vv. 10-13)**
    1. **(v. 10)** – begets a son who lives in the opposite way.
       1. Robber, sheds blood, commits idolatry, sexual immorality, social injustice, exacted usury.
    2. **(v. 13)** – He does not live for what his father did but dies for what he did.
       1. ***“His blood shall be upon him”*** – a phrase depicting culpability.
13. An Unrighteous Man’s Righteous Son Shall Live (**vv. 14-18**)
    1. (**v. 14)** – begets a son who lives righteously.
       1. **NOTE: He sees what his father did, considers, and acts differently!**
       2. No idolatry, no sexual immorality, no oppression or social injustice, active mercy and giving, faithful to God’s law.
    2. **(v. 17)** – He does not die for what his father did, but lives for what he did.
    3. **(v. 18)** – However, the son’s actions do not change the spiritual state of the father – He is responsible for his own life!
14. A Strange Objection **(vv. 19-20)**
    1. **(v. 19a)** – ***“you say”*** – based on the proverb.
       1. “Although the objection is expressed in the form of a rhetorical question, it really demands that a son be punished for the sins of his father.” (Block, Daniel I., NIC Old Testament)
       2. Later – **(v. 25)** – the Lord’s way is not fair – after expressing individual responsibility.
       3. Irony – complaint that God is not just, and things are not fair because we bear the consequences and guilt of our father’s sins, but a complaint against the contrary that demands we answer for our own sins.
       4. **They would rather sit in the pit of depression and self-pity while blaming it on others rather than take responsibility, put in the effort, and improve their situation by turning back to God.**
          1. **This perpetuates a cycle of resentment, pessimism, lethargy, sinfulness, and hopelessness – the only comfort is in the ability to deny fault.**
    2. **(vv. 19b-20)** – It isn’t that way because it is individual – it's on you either way!
15. Each Individual is Free from the Shadow of His Past (**vv. 21-29**)
16. **NOTE: If an individual is not confined to the shadow of his father’s sins, but is responsible for his own life, then what about the shadow of his own sins? If I don’t have to deal with my father’s, I still face my own!**
17. Abandoned Wickedness Leads to Life (**vv. 21-23**)
    1. **God does not say, “It’s all your fault and it's too late. You’re done and I’m done with you!”**
    2. Who is God? – **Exodus 34:6-7**
    3. **(v. 21)** – do what the son did in **verse 14**, except see your own sin and consider. **(v. 28)**
    4. **(v. 22)** – it will be remembered no more! – **cf. Psalm 103:11-14, 17-18** – forgiveness conditioned on repentance, and pursued righteousness.
    5. **(v. 23)** – He wants us to live!
18. Abandoned Righteousness Leads to Death **(v. 24)**
    1. The other way must be true as well!
    2. **NOTE: Some think they emphasize that we are saved by grace, and not by what we do, but then contradict the thought when they suggest a life filled with righteousness that ends with a little sin should not negate all the good.**
    3. The passage is filled with grace and mercy, but such is only found in righteousness and truth **– cf. Psalm 85:10**
19. The Righteousness of God **(vv. 25-29)**
    1. **(v. 25)** – we sense the petulance in the rebuttal of the people – like a child saying it isn’t fair that he gets in trouble for breaking the rules as he tries to pass the blame on another child.
       1. If the thought of the people was true, they would know true injustice. (**v. 29** – your ways are not fair)
20. God’s Desire and Call for Everyone **(vv. 4, 23, 30-32**)
21. The Value of Each Soul to God (**vv. 4, 23, 32**)
    1. Not willing that any should perish – **2 Peter 3:9**
    2. **God mourns for each soul that perishes in sin. Especially since He offers a way to life for all.**
22. God’s Call to Repentance and Transformation **(vv. 30-31)**
    1. **(v. 30)** – based on the way of the Lord being right/fair/true in contrast to their way, they will be judged FOR THEIR OWN WAYS.
       1. **This necessitates repentance** – their reality was personal sin, not simply transgenerational sin – even if their thoughts were true, they had done things themselves within their own lives.
       2. **Ezekiel 36:16-23** – their captivity was due to sin, but the following generations in captivity persisted in sin, causing God’s name to be profaned.
       3. ***“Repent…so that iniquity will not be your ruin”*** – (**vv. 21-22**) – because it will be left, forgiven, and forgotten.
    2. (**v. 31**) – when you’ve abandoned your sin, you must get a new heart and spirit.
       1. The opposite of which led to, and perpetuated your iniquity – **(v. 2)**
       2. One that takes accountability, responsibility, and pursues righteousness – (**v. 21** – ***“and does what is lawful and right”***)
       3. One that delights in God, and trusts in His ways – **(vv. 4, 25)**
       4. **Ezekiel 36:25-27** – meeting God in the way of His plans – He says YOU do it, but then says I’LL do it – radical repentance, devotion, and transformation by God’s grace which creates a heart that observes His will.
       5. New Covenant fulfillment – **Jeremiah 31:27-34** – these people do not place blame on their forefathers, but turn to God in true devotion, have His word on their hearts, and walk in sincere fellowship with God.

**Conclusion**

1. We can certainly be affected by those who came before us, but we are responsible for our own ways.
2. If we find ourselves severed from God’s fellowship it is only due to our own sin.
3. This can be changed. We can turn from a life of sin to God, receive forgiveness, and new life to fill with God’s righteous will.
4. **Our past does not dictate our future. By God’s grace we can leave the pit of sin and hopelessness, be transformed, and enrich our lives with God’s fellowship. But it requires taking responsibility for our own souls first.**