Ezekiel 18

Sour Grapes:
Every Soul Is Mine — Repent and Live

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

No one gets to blame his father for his own sin, and no one is doomed by his father's sin either. Every soul belongs to God and answers to Him directly. God takes no pleasure in anyone's death; He calls every man, whatever his family or past, to turn and live.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 18 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | ⇄ Sky Key repeated word

⚠ Rose Sin / warning | ★ Violet Promise / blessing | ◷ Amber Time / place / contrast

1 The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,

2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ⚠ The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

3 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ▲ ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

4 Behold, ▲ all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: ⚠ the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

5 But if a man be just, and Green do that which is lawful and right,

6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,

7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, Green hath given his bread to the hungry, and Green hath covered the naked with a garment;

8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from ⇄ iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,

9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, ★ he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.

10 If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things,

11 And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife,

12 ⚠ Hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination,

13 Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; ⚠ his blood shall be upon him.

14 Now, lo, if he beget a son, that ◷ seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like,

15 That hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife,

16 Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment,

17 That hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; ★ he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.

18 As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his ⇄ iniquity.

19 Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the ⇄ iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.

20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. ◷ The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the ⇄ iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

21 But if the wicked will ⇄ turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

22 All his transgressions that he hath committed, ★ they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

23 ▲ Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should re⇄ turn from his ways, and live?

24 But when the righteous ⇄ turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth ⇄ iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

25 Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; ▲ Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?

26 When a righteous man ⇄ turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth ⇄ iniquity, and dieth in them; for his ⇄ iniquity that he hath done shall he die.

27 Again, when the wicked man ⇄ turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

28 Because he considereth, and ⇄ turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

29 Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?

30 Therefore ▲ I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and ⇄ turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so ⇄ iniquity shall not be your ruin.

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and ▮▮ make you a new heart and a new spirit: for ▲ why will ye die, O house of Israel?

32 For ▲ I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore ⇄ turn yourselves, and live ye.

Marked in the text

- **v2** ⚠ The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge
- **v3** ▲ ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel
- **v4** ▲ all souls are mine
- **v4** ⚠ the soul that sinneth, it shall die
- **v5** ▮▮ do that which is lawful and right
- **v7** ▮▮ hath given his bread to the hungry
- **v7** ▮▮ hath covered the naked with a garment
- **v8** ⇄ iniquity *(every occurrence)*
- **v9** ★ he shall surely live
- **v12** ⚠ Hath oppressed the poor and needy
- **v13** ⚠ his blood shall be upon him
- **v14** ◷ seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like
- **v17** ★ he shall not die for the iniquity of his father
- **v20** ◷ The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father
- **v21** ⇄ turn *(every occurrence)*
- **v22** ★ they shall not be mentioned unto him

- **v23** ▲ Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?
- **v24** ⚠ when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness
- **v25** ▲ Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?
- **v30** ▲ I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways
- **v30** ▮▮ Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions
- **v31** ▮▮ make you a new heart and a new spirit
- **v31** ▲ why will ye die, O house of Israel?
- **v32** ▲ I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth
- **v32** ▮▮ wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 18:4 (KJV)

4 Behold, ▲ all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: ⚠ the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Setting

This oracle is also undated; it falls between 592 BC (8:1) and 591 BC (20:1). The exiles in Babylon, and the people still in Jerusalem, had a saying that explained their troubles: "The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge" (v2). Jeremiah heard the same proverb back home (Jer 31:29). It meant: we are paying for our parents' sins — Manasseh's idolatry and the generations before us — so it's not our fault, and there's nothing we can do. God answers with an oath: "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore" (v3).

Structure

- vv1–4 — **the proverb rejected:** "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" (v4).
- vv5–9 — **the righteous man:** "if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness" (v5) — he does not "eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols" (v6), does not defile his neighbor's wife (v6), does not oppress, "gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing" (v7), does not "lend money on interest or take increase" (v8), "walks in My statutes and My ordinances" — "he is righteous and will surely live" (v9).
- vv10–13 — **his violent son:** a son who robs, sheds blood and does none of these things, who "oppresses the poor and needy" (v12) — "he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head" (v13).
- vv14–18 — **the grandson who chooses differently:** a son who "has observed all his father's sins" and "does not do likewise" (v14) — "he will not die for his father's iniquity, he will surely live" (v17). His father dies for his own iniquity (v18).

- vv19–20 — **the principle stated:** "Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?" (v19). Answer: "The person who sins will die" (v20). Neither bears the other's iniquity; "the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (v20).
- vv21–24 — **turning either way:** "if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed" he will surely live (v21); "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him" (v22). "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked … rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?" (v23). But "when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness" and does evil, his past righteousness will not be remembered (v24).
- vv25–29 — **"not right":** they say, "The way of the Lord is not right" (v25). God: "Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?" (v25). The wicked man who turns "will save his life" (v27); because he "considered and turned away from all his transgressions," he will surely live (v28).
- vv30–32 — **the call:** "I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct … Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you" (v30). "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?" (v31). "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies … Therefore, repent and live" (v32).

Repeated words

surely live (vv9, 17, 19, 21, 28); turn (vv21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30); practices justice and righteousness (vv5, 21, 27); statutes (vv9, 17, 19, 21); iniquity (vv8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 30); transgressions (vv22, 28, 30, 31); the way of the Lord is not right (vv25, 29); pleasure (vv23, 32).

Contrasts

"The fathers eat the sour grapes" (v2) ⟷ "The soul who sins will die" (v4). The righteous father (vv5–9) ⟷ the violent son (vv10–13) ⟷ the grandson who "does not do likewise" (vv14–17). The wicked man turning to life (vv21–22) ⟷ the righteous man turning to death (v24). "The way of the Lord is not right" (v25) ⟷ "Is it not your ways that are not right?" (v25). Death that God takes no pleasure in (v32) ⟷ "repent and live" (v32).

Chapter theme (my words)

No one gets to blame his father for his own sin, and no one is doomed by his father's sin either. Every soul belongs to God and answers to Him directly. God takes no pleasure in anyone's death; He calls every man, whatever his family or past, to turn and live.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 18:30 (KJV)

30 Therefore ▲ I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and ⇄ turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so ⇄ iniquity shall not be your ruin.

The sour grapes proverb (vv1–3)

Guzik: "Just because the proverb was popular did not mean that it was true." Block, in Guzik, says the proverb "reflects a materialistic fatalism, a resignation to immutable cosmic rules of cause and effect." The exiles had a point to twist. God had said He visits "the iniquity of the fathers on the children" of "those who hate Me" (Exod 20:5), and Judah's fall was tied to Manasseh's sins (2 Kgs 24:3–4). Guzik suggests they twisted Exodus 20:4–6 into an excuse, missing that the punishment falls on generations who keep on hating God, while His lovingkindness goes to thousands who love Him. Generations suffer the *consequences* of their parents' choices; they don't carry their parents' *guilt* before God (Deut 24:16).

"All souls are Mine" (v4)

God owns every person — father and son alike — and deals with each directly. "The soul who sins will die." Does "die" mean physical death in the coming fall of Jerusalem, or eternal death? Some read the chapter mainly as covenant life and death in the land, since some righteous people did die in the siege. Guzik grants the physical side but concludes, "Ezekiel must have the eternal life and death of people primarily in mind." The NT applies the principle at the deepest level: "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

Three generations (vv5–18)

The righteous man is described by his conduct: no idol feasts on the hills, no adultery, no oppression, no greedy lending to the poor (Exod 22:25; Deut 23:19–20), bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, honest judgment. His son is a violent robber; he dies for his own sins (v13). The grandson "has observed all his father's sins" and chooses the other way (v14). Many see three of Judah's kings in this pattern: godly Hezekiah, wicked Manasseh, godly Josiah (though Josiah was actually Manasseh's grandson). Morgan, in Guzik: "Neither righteousness nor evil is hereditary."

Is this salvation by works?

No. The righteous man "walks in My statutes" (v9) — this is a man living inside God's covenant, whose life shows his faith, not a man earning his way. The law always pointed to faith (Hab 2:4; Gen 15:6). Guzik notes two exceptions to the "each bears his own" rule in Romans 5: Adam's guilt passed to all humanity, and Christ's righteousness passed to all who believe (Rom 5:12–19). And he adds, "Today we relate with God by a new and better covenant, but we still understand the heart of God's ancient law for today."

Turning either way (vv21–24)

The wicked man who turns is fully restored, not put on probation: "All his transgressions … will not be remembered against him" (v22; compare Ps 103:12; Isa 43:25). And "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" (v23). Guzik: "God is *not* sadistic and cruel, making repentance impossible because He loves to see humanity suffer." Taylor, in Guzik: "It is the Lord's longing and will and purpose that men should be saved." The reverse is also true: a righteous man who turns to evil cannot bank on his past (v24). Christians read v24 differently: some see it as proof that a believer can fall away; others say a true believer will persevere, and that those who finally turn away show their righteousness was never genuine (1 John 2:19), with the warning itself being one of God's means of keeping His people. Guzik lets the warning stand and quotes Wright that the verse "raises difficulties in the N.T. context of the final perseverance of the saints." Block, in Guzik: "People may not bank on a treasury of past good deeds."

"Not right" (vv25–29)

The people accuse God of being unfair — the Hebrew word means "not weighed out evenly." God turns the charge around: their ways are the crooked ones. They wanted to blame the past and still escape the consequences. God's way is perfectly even: each person is judged by his own way.

"Repent and live" (vv30–32)

The chapter ends in an altar call. "Repent and turn away" (v30) — the same Hebrew verb, *shub*, twice. "Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (v31). God commands what only He can give; He has already promised it (11:19) and will promise it again (36:26). Guzik ties the new heart to the new covenant. Command and promise meet in Christ: God calls us to turn, and gives the new heart that makes turning possible. "For why will you die?" (v31) is a Father's plea (compare 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4).

Word study (Hebrew)

- **proverb — *mashal* (H4912):** a saying, proverb.
- **sour grapes — *boser* (H1155):** unripe, sour grapes.
- **set on edge — *qahah* (H6949):** to be blunt, dull.
- **soul — *nephesh* (H5315):** a living being, person, life.
- **righteous — *tsaddiq* (H6662):** just, righteous.
- **justice — *mishpat* (H4941):** judgment, what is right.
- **righteousness — *tsedaqah* (H6666):** right conduct, righteousness.
- **pledge — *chabol* (H2258):** a pledge taken for a loan.
- **interest — *neshek* (H5392):** interest, literally "a bite."
- **iniquity — *ʿavon* (H5771):** guilt, iniquity, its punishment.
- **transgressions — *pesha*ʿ (H6588):** rebellion, transgression.
- **turn / repent — *shub* (H7725):** to turn back, return.
- **pleasure — *chaphets* (H2654):** to delight in, take pleasure.
- **not right — *takan* (H8505):** to weigh, measure — "not even, not fair."
- **stumbling block — *mikshol* (H4383):** an obstacle, cause of falling.

- **new — *chadash* (H2319):** new, fresh.
- **spirit — *ruach* (H7307):** spirit, wind, breath.

Cross-references

Gen 15:6; Exod 20:5–6; Deut 24:16; 2 Kgs 14:6; 2 Kgs 24:3–4; Ps 51:10; Ps 103:12; Isa 43:25; Isa 55:7; Jer 31:29–34; Lam 5:7; Ezek 11:19–20; Ezek 33:10–20; Ezek 36:26–27; Hab 2:4; Luke 15:7; John 9:1–3; Acts 3:19; Rom 2:6; Rom 5:12–19; Rom 6:23; 2 Cor 5:10, 17; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 2:19.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 18:7 (KJV)

7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, ¶ hath given his bread to the hungry, and ¶ hath covered the naked with a garment;

Command to obey — "Repent and live" (v32)

This is the command God loves to give. I don't need to clean myself up before I turn; I turn and He gives the new heart (v31; 36:26). I'll name one thing I need to turn from today, and turn — not tomorrow.

Sin to confess — blaming my father

The sour grapes proverb is alive and well: "My dad drank." "I grew up in that neighborhood." "That's just how our family is." My past shaped me, but it doesn't excuse me. I'll confess where I've used my story as a reason not to change.

Warning to heed — no bank account of past righteousness (v24)

Years of faithfulness don't give me permission to coast or slide. The righteous man who turns away cannot cash in his past. I need to keep turning toward God every day — and keep watch over my heart.

Promise to trust — the chain can be broken (vv14–17)

The grandson "observed all his father's sins" and "does not do likewise" (v14). For the men I disciple — sons of addicts, sons of prisoners, men who swore they'd never be like their fathers and became them anyway — this verse is a door. You are not doomed by your family. "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him" (v22). In Christ, the cycle ends with you.

Example to follow — the God who takes no pleasure in death

"Why will you die?" (v31). God pleads. I want to reach men the same way — not with condemnation, but with a Father's plea to turn and live. When I sit with a man who has failed again, I want my words to sound like v32.

Worship

Every soul is His. He judges with perfect fairness, and still He has no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies. He commands a new heart and then gives it. His way is right; mine was crooked. Thank You, Lord, for not remembering my transgressions against me.

Prayer

Lord GOD, all souls are Yours, and mine is too. Forgive me for blaming others for my sin. Thank You that I'm not chained to my father's failures, and that my sons are not chained to mine. Give me the new heart and new spirit only You can give. Keep me turning to You every day. And use me to call other men to turn and live. Amen.