

## October 9

**Scriptures:** Read Ezekiel 18, 19 & 20

**Key Verse:** “Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.” (Ezekiel 18:30b)

### Overview

After Ezekiel’s message of the certainty of divine judgment, he wanted the people to have a sense of their own sin, which he hoped would lead them to true repentance, for only then would they have life. It seems to be a part of human nature, however, that no one likes to admit guilt or take the blame. This problem was evident in the common proverb of Ezekiel’s day which expressed the people’s notion that they were suffering for the sins of their fathers, not their own (18:2; cf. Jer. 31:29). They recognized that their subjugation by Babylon was a judgment of God, but they blamed it on the sinfulness of past generations. It is true that the sins of a father can have an adverse effect and a bad influence on his children who are prone to learn and follow his sinful ways (cf. Ex. 20:5-6) but, as Ezekiel illustrates, such is not always the case. The main point stressed in chapter 18 is the biblical principle of individual responsibility and accountability before God. He deals with every person on his own merits (Gal. 6:7), and as this chapter makes clear, He deals with absolute justice and fairness. He would never punish a son for his father’s sins (cf. Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6), nor would He accredit righteousness to a son simply because his father was a righteous man.

In his picture of the righteous man, Ezekiel lists some of the qualities and obligations inherent in the term “righteous” (18:5-9; cf. Zech. 7:9; Micah 6:8). The high morals and good deeds, however, do not make a man righteous; they spring from inner righteousness which results from “a new heart and a new spirit” (18:31) — this is available to all who believe in Jesus through the New Covenant of His grace. Because of God’s great love for mankind, He desires to impart life and not death. Therefore, He desires that all would repent and turn from sin, that they might have that life (18:31-32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Lev. 18:4-5; Rom. 3:20-28).

The allegorical lamentations in chapter 19 illustrate the sadness and death that comes to the nation or to the individual who does not repent and turn from sin; kings are no exception. Judah is pictured as a lioness. Her cubs become vicious lions that have tragic ends, portraying the last kings of Judah. The first lion clearly represents Jehoahaz, who was taken captive to Egypt (19:4; 2 Kings 23:31-33). The second represents either Jehoiachin or Zedekiah, both of whom were taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:15; 25:7). If it is a reference to Zedekiah, it is a prophecy that was soon to be fulfilled.

In the second allegory of chapter 19, Judah is likened to a vine that was once full of foliage and very fruitful. Its strong branches represent such kings as David and Solomon. But the once beautiful and proud vine became withered, broken by the east wind (Babylon), and then burned since it was useless. The fire, however, did not originate with the enemy; it came from a branch within (19:14) — a reference to Zedekiah, the last king, whose rebelliousness and sin against God brought ruin upon himself, his kingdom, and his people. The small portion of the withered vine that escaped the fire in Judah was transplanted “in a dry and thirsty land”, referring to the

spiritual climate in Babylon. With the certainty of his prophetic foresight, Ezekiel spoke as though the events represented in this allegory had already happened.

Chapter 20 begins a new series of prophecies (ch. 20 — ch. 23) spoken two years and one month after Ezekiel's calling (1:2) and dated eleven months after the last date mentioned (8:1). By this time, Zedekiah had revolted against the Babylonians. The elders came to Ezekiel, likely to inquire about the outcome; yet if this were the case, they came in unbelief, for Ezekiel had already prophesied to them that Jerusalem would fall. Whatever the reason, they did not come to the Lord in humble repentance, or else He would have heard them. They were insincere and hypocritical (vv. 29-31), so the Lord did not permit them to inquire of Him. What the Lord did have Ezekiel do, however, was remind them of their nation's constant apostacies. He did this by tracing their history from Egypt until the present time. The abomination of idolatry is strongly and repeatedly condemned, for it constantly separated them from God and provoked divine wrath against them. Had it not been for His grace (undeserved favour) and for His Name's sake (His reputation before the heathen as the almighty God of Israel), He would have consumed Israel by His fury on numerous occasions (e.g. Ex. 32:11-14; Nu. 14:11-20; 25:11).

The goodness and severity of God are illustrated well in His chastisement and judgment of His people, which would serve to rid them of idolatry (20:32) and purge all the rebellious; after this He would restore the faithful remnant to the land (20:38). This prophecy points forward to the time when the Lord Jesus will establish His kingdom in the New Jerusalem, inhabited solely by those who believe in Him and serve Him (20:40). Their continual praises to the Lord will be the "sweet aroma" that was merely typified in the Old Covenant's Tabernacle. For the first time, they will truly serve, hallow, and bring glory to the Lord before the Gentiles (20:41).

## **Prayer**

Lord, we praise Your Name today and thank You for giving us eternal life through Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We long to see You face to face and worship You throughout eternity.