

Ezekiel 18:17-23, 30

The Torah reading in Exodus 23-24 refers to the promise by Israel: "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient." (**Exodus 24:7**) and the warning that the Angel of the Lord "will not pardon your transgressions" (**Exodus 23:21**).

Ezekiel clarifies that each person is responsible only for his own sins, not those of his fathers or children.

Ezekiel 18:17 - "That has taken off his hand from the poor, that has not received usury nor increase, has executed my judgments, has walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live."

The passage this addresses the question about "the third and the fourth generations" in Exodus 20:5-6:

Exodus 20:5-6 - "...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."

The error in interpretation was forgetting the part about God's showing lovingkindness "to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Ezekiel explains corrects this in this chapter. He starts with debunking a proverb described in verse 2.

See also **Jeremiah 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."

The sour grapes which the fathers eat are the sins which they commit; the setting of the children's teeth on edge is the consequence, i.e., the suffering which the children have to endure.

But see **Deuteronomy 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."

The "proverbial wisdom" was wrong.

Jesus addressed a similar question:

John 9:1-3 - "Now as Jesus was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth, and His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God would be displayed in him..."

Repentance disrupts fate and changes everything:

Ezekiel 18:21-22 - "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. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live."

Ezekiel 18:30-31 - "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. 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?"

Ezekiel 18:5 - "But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right..."

See **Romans 3:10-12** - "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

He's quoting **Ecclesiastes 7:20** - "For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."

The only just man was Christ, who was without sin. Repentance brings us under His covering blood of the Atonement on the cross.

Ezekiel says "a new heart and a new spirit" are required. In fact, you must become a different person, "born from above," as Jesus tells Nicodemus (**John 3:1-7**).

See **Joel 2:13** - "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

Repentance as the Eye of a Needle

"Open the door for me, my beloved sister..." ("Shir HaShirim"/Song of Songs 5:2) Rabbi Yesa said, 'The Holy One, Blessed be He said to Israel, "My sons, Open the door of Repentance as the 'eye of a needle,' and I will open it for you so that wagons and carriages can pass through." (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 24)

A Midrash on the Song of Songs uses the phrase to speak of God's willingness and ability beyond comparison, to accomplish the salvation of a sinner: "The Holy One said, open for me a door as big as a needle's eye and I will open for you a door through which may enter tents and [camels?]."

Compare **Matthew 19:23-26** - "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When the disciples heard this,

they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Cyril of Alexandria claimed that "camel" is a Greek misspelling; that *kamêlos* (camel) was written in place of *kamilos*, meaning "rope" or "cable." Possibly as a play on words.

The Power of Repentance

"One who does *teshuvah* (repentance) is considered as if he went to Jerusalem, rebuilt the Temple, erected the altar, and offered all the sacrifices ordained by the Torah. [For the Psalm says], 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise [51:19]'" - Leviticus Rabbah 7:2 (Midrash)

The repentant sinner attains a more exalted spiritual eminence than he who has never sinned (Ber. 34b; "Yad," l.c. vii. 4)

God forgave the people of Israel the sin of the golden calf only that they might teach the world repentance ('Ab. Zarah 4b).

The Messiah, according to one rabbi, is called "Hadrak" (dwelling) because he shall lead all mankind to repent of their sins before God (Cant. 7:5, with reference to Zechariah 9:1).

Zechariah 9:1 - "The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD."

This fulfillment began at Pentecost, and then throughout the spread of the Gospel among the Gentile nations - "when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD."