

Ezekiel 18:4-17, 32

*(Some of this chapter also served earlier as the haftarah for **Exodus 23-24**)*

Relating to the Torah reading on **Leviticus 4** and the sin offering, this haftarah begins by telling us that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Ezekiel 18:4 - "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."

At the beginning of the chapter, God wants to debunk a popular proverb:

Ezekiel 18:2 - "What do you mean by quoting this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers eat sour grapes And the children's teeth become numb?'

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 from the beginning.

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...'"

The Ultimate Problem - The Need for the Sin Offering

- **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."

Paul'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.

Repentance disrupts fate and changes everything:

Ezekiel 18:26 - "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."

Ezekiel 18:27 - "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."

Repentance = Making a New Heart and New Spirit

Ezekiel 18:30-32 - "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? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."

God is telling *us* to "make" a new heart." Elsewhere it is He who does it. In truth we cooperate by our agreement, y saying "Amen" to Him.

Jesus tells Nicodemus something similar (**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 [Psalm 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).