

Ezekiel Chapters 17-18 - John Karmelich

Title "Accountability"

I suspect most of us veteran Christians realize all too well, we're accountable to God for our behavior. I also realize that on judgment day, Christians don't lose eternal life because of our standing in Jesus! All I'm saying is the Christian life's a balance between understanding our eternal standing depends fully on Jesus and not on our good works! We also realize God hold us accountable for how we live! We know rewards exist in heaven based on how faithful we're to what He called us to do. Hopefully, it motivates us to use our lives as a witness for Him! I also realize these chapters are pretty much historical facts on the nation of Israel for failing to be a witness for God. Their failure to live as God called them to live is what caused the fall of that nation roughly 2,600 years ago. I also realize Bible study is not to get us to focus on ancient history. These chapters remind us that we're accountable to God. It also means good things occur for those who trust in Him and really bad things for those who ignore that call! This is not about financial earnings in this life. It's about eternal rewards for living as God calls us to live. Again, I realize I'm preaching to the choir! Reminding ourselves of accountability reminds us why we're saved!

With that said, Chapter 17 is essentially historical facts explained through a riddle! In Chapter 18, God reminds us that punishment will occur for all who turn from Him. It also states, God has no pleasure in the death of wicked people! It reminds us God cares about us and desires to spend eternity with people who trust in Him. I figure committed Christians know that, but don't think about it much! So why read all this? To remind us God's calling us to make a difference for Him and we're accountable to Him!

I'm well aware this section of Ezekiel is starting to get a little repetitive. If you've read these lessons to date, you get that God is ticked off at the Israelites for turning from Him! God is using the Babylonians as His instrument to show the Israelites the price for not using one's life as a witness for God. We grasp that once one's called by God it's never a matter of ignoring Him and living like He doesn't matter! We are saved to make a difference for Him! So why "rub it in" chapter after chapter that He has had it with disobedience and there's a limit to His patience for those of us who are called? Further, I suspect all of us know people who claim they are Christians but "live like the devil" and nothing bad ever happens to them! Never confuse the fact God judges with WHEN He judges! An old saying is, "The wheels of the gods grind slowly but thoroughly!" Accountability to God comes for all of us at some point! I NEVER claim to be perfect, and God knows I've suffered for what mistakes I've made. Of course, God forgives and the fact I'm still alive to write this shows He shows us mercy even through His judgment. Hints of God's mercy also comes through some of the writing here in these chapters. OK, onto it then!

Chapter 17 opens with a riddle. The riddle is explained later in the chapter. Think of the riddle as just a way to get everyone to contemplate what God is saying through Ezekiel. In essence, the Babylonian Empire is compared to a giant eagle and Israel is compared to a smaller eagle in the same area. What's being communicated is in effect God allowed the Babylonian Empire to dominate the Middle East and the Israelites must accept it! The Babylonian leader allowed the Israelites to remain in their land if they agreed not to rebel against that leader. The Babylonian leader kept his word while it is implied that the Israelites tried to go to Egypt to prevent that from happening. The point is about accepting what God's ordained. Sometimes God allows us to suffer as He wants to discipline us to turn our back on Him.

Remember that God helped the Israelites escape from Egypt. Turning to Egypt for help not only makes the Israelites look helpless but also that God can't help them! Historically about then, Babylon defeated Egypt in a big battle and effectively ended Egypt as a mighty power in that region! What we must keep

in mind is God is always watching our behavior! Even when we're not thinking about Him, realize God loves us too much to ever leave us alone! So, when we turn from Him, it is not just discipline to make us feel bad, it's the reminder that He loves us and wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him!

Bottom line most of Chapter 17's negative describing the punishment that will come upon the Israelites for failing to live as witness for Him. Yes, many died due to that failure. Still God didn't wipe them out as an entity despite their sins! The last few verses of the chapter imply the future restoration when THE Messiah (Jesus to us Christians) will rule the world from Jerusalem. In other words, God is saying, yes, the situation is horrible now (at that time) but just as God's word came true about what happened to the nation of Israel then, so we can trust His word about the future! To put it another way, if Jesus is going to rule the world from Israel there must be a "believing Israel" to rule from! The last few verses here in this chapter imply that.

I admit I've been a bit vague describing the details of the "two eagle story" in Chapter 17. I wanted the focus to be on how this applies to us, so I stuck to those issues versus the historical details. Speaking of how God expects us to act, I present Chapter 18. The key question of this chapter the Israelites ponder is why must they suffer for their parents' sins? Those Israelites are saying it is not our fault our parents and grandparents turned from God! "We promise to be good" so please stop all this punishment for our sake! God through Ezekeil explained that if a parent is a "bad egg" and their child is a "good egg", then the child won't suffer the eternal fate of the parent! It means we are back to accountability! God makes the statement in this chapter that He takes zero pleasure in the death of wicked people!

One of the things that always fascinated me is if God exists, why does He want to spend eternity with a lot of people? God by definition does not need anything! Since He created the universe, why is it He's willing to go to all the trouble of having Himself pay the price for our sins so we can be forgiven in the perfect sense just to be with Him forever? I'm convinced the reason Satan and a third of the angels did rebel is they figured out God chose people and not them to be the center of His love! The best answer I can figure is if He has a desire to express His love upon something! He chose us and we must accept it and live as God desires (to be a witness for Him)! Bottom line is that's how "the game is to be played"! We might as well accept it and make the best of the time He gives us to live as He desires!

You might think I've wandered away from Chapter 18, but no I haven't! Ezekial is explaining to all of his audience that there's in effect two issues at stake: One is individual responsibility (for those who do trust in Him and want to use our lives as a witness for Him) and the other is "corporate responsibility"! That simply means that not only are we individually accountable, but also as a church or a community, as a witness for Him. Israel was accountable as a nation and well, they blew it so bad, in effect, God is putting them "in the penalty box" for being a bad witness for Him. Yes, many Israelites died including I suspect many who believed in Him! The point for us is to realize we are accountable to God, and that includes whatever group commitment we made to be a witness for Him as well.

That leads to the question, what did the Israelites do wrong? I noticed murder, stealing or even sexual sins are not listed. Think of those as "givens". Instead, Ezekiel lists other sins. Again, the issue for all of us is about being a good witness for God. For example, Ezekiel lists not being a "loan shark", to use a term most of us are familiar with! To not help a neighbor in need is another issue! God wants us who are called to be a witness for Him to "live like it"! Then Ezekiel states when a "righteous" person turns for the worse God notices and unless they repent, they'll suffer for it! The opposite applies for a sinner who repents! I suspect most of us know this. Again, the underlying issue is accountability. I realize on judgment day Christians are saved, but the issue is accountability while we're still alive. It's something

most of Christians instinctively know but it's good to keep it in mind! Ezekiel isn't going to preach like this till the end of the book, but it's essential this idea be there for those of us who believe in Jesus!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on that link on the same page! It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks for reading all this!