

The Blame Game

Today In Your Reading...

God used Ezekiel to confront a deceitful doctrine promoted among His people. The doctrine was passed along in this proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children's mouths pucker at the taste" (18:2). Simply put, they were blaming the judgment that they were experiencing on the sins of preceding generations.

This **blame game** hearkened back to the days of Moses and the Ten Commandments. The Lord told the people, "I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations" (*Exodus 20:5*). So were the people correct in their assumption? Were they being judged for the sins of previous generations?

On one hand, the people were correct in their assessment. The judgment of Judah was a cumulative punishment for the nation. Many generations had chosen to do what was evil in God's sight; He could not allow the nation to survive, much less succeed.

Is it not true that what one generation chooses to do will affect future generations? Think of the choices our nation's forefathers have made. Has the practice of slavery (1619-1865) had any long-lasting effects on our country? What about our national decision to embrace evolution, welfare, or abortion? Will our promotion of political correctness, same-sex marriage, or transgenderism influence our descendants? Absolutely. God's warning is legitimate. **The sins of one generation, in this case idolatry (*Exodus 20:5*), have consequences in the next.**

On the other hand, Ezekiel's contemporaries were using this truth — that the sins of one generation affect another — to justify their innocence. In other words, they were not taking responsibility for their own sins but, instead, shifting the blame and the focus on others. Sadly, as

they blamed others for their situation, they also blamed God for being unjust, for punishing them for something they did not do. Here, then, is the dangerous deception Ezekiel confronted.

The Lord made it clear, even in the days of Moses, that a person dies on account of his own sins, not because of the sins of his fathers (*Deut. 24:16; Ezekiel 18:4*). While national judgment is based on national sin, **personal judgment is based on personal sin**. No one but Christ is without sin; therefore, God is just in His judgment of both men and nations.

Daily Reflection

Have you ever played the blame game, pointing fingers at what others have done while ignoring your own depravity? Why do we do that?

How do the words of Jesus relate to this issue? "The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. Why worry about the speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye, then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye" (*Matthew 7:3-5*).

Your judgment is based on your sin, period. The good news is that **those in Christ have had their sins exchanged for His righteousness.**

To the Honor of His Name

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August 21 — *Ezekiel 20:1-22:16*

Day 233 — 132 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord gave Ezekiel more prophecies about the approaching threat of the Babylonians and the destruction of Israel. It seems that we have read similar passages for quite some time now, so many that it may be tempting to skip over them. However, it is in passages like these that we usually find something hidden and helpful.

Repeated several times in our passage today was the phrase, **"To protect the honor of My name."** God was describing His desire to punish His people for their idol worship while they were in Egypt, but He didn't do it *to protect the honor of His name* (20:9). He wanted to destroy them for their rebellion in the desert, but He didn't do it *to protect the honor of His name* (20:14). Finally, He has wanted to destroy His people in the Promised Land for their neglect of their covenant and its laws, but He didn't do *to protect the honor of His name* (20:22).

We find similar passages all throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example, God said to Isaiah, "Yet for My own sake and *for the honor of My name*, I will hold back My anger and not wipe you out. I will rescue you for My sake, yes, for My own sake! I will not let My reputation be tarnished and I will not share My glory with idols!" (48:9, 11).

No one is more zealous to bring honor to the Lord's name than He is. He made all things to bring honor to His name (*Psalms 19:1*). He chose Israel to be His special nation, to bring honor to His name (*Jeremiah 13:11*). He sent Jesus to bring honor to His name (*John 7:18*). We, too, were chosen, before the foundation of the world, to bring honor to His name (*Ephesians 1:4-6*). He instructs us to do all things for the honor of His name (*1 Corinthians 10:31*). Truth be told, **there is no other name but His that is worthy of such honor.**

Daily Reflection

The name of a person involves more than that by which he is called, his identity. **A person's name is synonymous with his character.** Wherever his name goes, there goes his reputation. Attached to a name is one's nature, attributes, qualities, and honor. One's name might bring to mind his strengths or weaknesses, depending on our interaction with him. That's why Solomon wrote, "A good name is to be desired more than great riches" (*Proverbs 22:1*).

The Lord's name is holy, righteous, and perfect. His character has no deficiencies, and His nature is lacking in nothing. No one can have a better name than our God. However, **His reputation is marred by those with whom He associates**, those with whom He has covenanted with. Those who bear His name can either bring Him honor or dishonor, depending on their actions. While He makes decisions that bring Him honor, they may make decisions that bring dishonor.

In light of this truth, the third commandment becomes much clearer, "Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God" (*Exodus 20:7*). Other translations say it this way, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." While we tend to think of this verse in relation to our speech, its meaning includes much more. The word for "take" here is the word for "carry." **We are not to carry the Lord's name in a way that dishonors Him.** To bear the name of Christ yet do something that is unbiblical or un-Christian is to take the Lord's name in vain. It is to be Christian in name only.

Are you carrying the Lord's name with honor or dishonor? Do your thoughts, your words, and your actions align with His? Are you carrying out His agenda, His mission, His purposes, or your own? **The Lord is zealous to protect the honor of His name. Are you?**

Stand in the Gap

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord had some harsh things to say to His people for their sinful deeds. He used three analogies to describe His disfavor. First, He said, "The people are the *worthless slag* that remains after silver is smelted. They are the dross that is left over, a useless mixture of copper, tin, iron, and lead. I will melt them down in the heat of My fury" (22:17-22).

Second, He described them as *adulterous women*, who had given themselves to the idols of their neighbors. They disdained their marriage vows — their covenant with God — and chased the pleasures of other lovers. "You will drink from the cup of terror," said the Lord, "a cup that is large and deep. You will be fully paid for your prostitution, your worship of idols. You will suffer the full penalty!" (23:32, 49).

Third, He portrayed His people in a *pot over a fire*. "Destruction is certain for Jerusalem, the city of murderers! She is a pot full of corruption. I myself will pile up the fuel beneath her! The time has come and I won't hold back. I will not change My mind. You will be judged on the basis of all your wicked actions" (24:6, 14).

God had reached the end of His patience. He was about to pour out His wrath on the nation of Judah; but, before He did, He "looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for **someone to stand in the gap in the wall** so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one" (22:30).

I found this statement interesting for several reasons. First, notice what it was that guarded the land from destruction — "the wall of righteousness." As we have discussed before, *a nation's stability is directly linked to its morality*, whether it does right by God's standards.

Second, if that wall of righteousness begins to crack or crumble, **the Lord looks for people to stand in the gap**. In other words, God uses individuals to confront sin in a nation — like a Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Hezekiah, or Josiah — so that His anger and judgment will be averted. *Here again is the remarkable influence that one person can have in the course of history.*

Finally, the Lord identified leaders in the land who, instead of standing in the gaps, "repaired the cracked walls with whitewash" (22:28). Of course, these are not leaders at all, but charlatans who talk a big game but deceive everyone with rhetoric and no real solutions.

Daily Reflection

Of course the person who would stand in the gap for all men, **the ultimate solution to our sin problem, is Jesus Christ**. He is the only one who could avert the wrath of God for good. He breached the wall of righteousness which now surrounds and protects us for all time.

However, the Father, through Jesus Christ, sent us, His followers, out into the world to be salt and light, **agents of change**, to stand in the gap and halt the advance of decay with the Gospel. What does that look like in real life?

In our nation today, our wall of righteousness is cracking and crumbling. There are many holes to plug. The Lord is looking for men and women to stand in the gap on His behalf. **Is that you?** Are you ready and willing to be used by Him?

Can't Have It Both Ways

Today In Your Reading...

We heard from both Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The Lord asked Ezekiel to prophesy against His people and the surrounding nations of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and Egypt. All of these nations were under God's judgment and Babylon was His instrument to perform it. Once again, we see the truth that **God governs the nations and keeps them accountable**. He builds them up and He tears them down.

For example, here was His comment about Assyria, "Because of the magnificence I gave this tree, it was the envy of all the other trees. But, it became proud and arrogant, and because it set itself so high above the others, I handed it over to a mighty nation that destroyed it as its wickedness deserves. **I Myself discarded it...**

Let no other nation proudly exult in its own prosperity, though it be higher than the clouds, for all are doomed. They will end up in the pit along with all the proud people of the world" (*Ezekiel 31:9-14*).

On the other hand, Jeremiah gave us an inside look at the last days of Judah's King Zedekiah. Jeremiah told him that he would not escape Nebuchadnezzar, but that he would be taken into captivity and die in Babylon. The King did not like this news, so he sent his officials to beg Jeremiah to ask the Lord to deliver him. "Please ask God to help us," they asked. "Perhaps the Lord will be gracious and do a mighty miracle as He has done in the past. Perhaps He will force Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw his armies" (*21:2*).

Of course, the Lord knew that this plea was insincere, as Zedekiah had done evil in His sight. It was only a last effort to save his life from the judgment he brought upon himself and the people. The Lord responded, "I Myself will fight against you with great power, for I am very angry! You have made Me furious!" (*21:3-5*).

Daily Reflection

Are you familiar with the phrase, "You can't have your cake and eat it too"? This strange saying is an English proverb or figure of speech that means you cannot or should not try to have two incompatible things. For example, you might say that you would like to swim but you can't get wet, or that you are hungry and would like to eat but don't like the food offered to you. **You can't have it both ways.**

Have you, or someone you know, ever tried to have your cake and eat it too? How so?

How is this proverb true for King Zedekiah?

As I have mentioned before, Zedekiah followed his own passions, fulfilled his own desires, and ignored God's words and ways; but, when his ways proved to be disastrous, he turned to the Lord in the last minute and begged for help. He couldn't have his cake and eat it too. He couldn't have it both ways. It doesn't work like that.

"Don't be misled — you cannot mock God. **You will harvest what you plant.** Those who live to satisfy their sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest life from the Spirit. For we are each responsible for our own conduct" (*Galatians 6:5, 7-9*).

Like Night and Day

Today In Your Reading...

We watched Jeremiah in the last days of the kingdom of Judah. He was imprisoned at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's third and final siege of Jerusalem, but the Lord continued to send him messages regarding the future. He even told him to purchase land in Anathoth. If the nation was about to be destroyed and conquered, why would God tell Jeremiah to buy land? It was a symbolic reminder that the Lord would bring the people back and, one day, restore the nation of Judah to its former greatness.

"I will surely bring My people back again from all the countries where I will scatter them in My fury. I will bring them back to this very city and let them live in peace and safety... I will heal Jerusalem's damage and give her prosperity and peace. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and Israel and rebuild her cities. I will cleanse away their sins against Me, and I will forgive all the nations of the earth! The people of the world will see the good I do for My people and will tremble with awe!" (32:37; 33:6-9).

The Lord also gave Jeremiah a prophecy of the coming Messiah. "At that time I will bring to the throne of David a righteous descendant, and He will do what is just and right throughout the land. In that day Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety, and their motto will be 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (33:15, 16).

I realize that these things are not new. We have heard them before. However, what I was reminded of today was the Lord's faithfulness. In fact, Jeremiah also brought attention to it, when he said, "**Everything has happened just as He said it would**" (32:24). The nation had fallen, the Babylonians had come, and the people were carried into exile. If all of this happened, as He said it would, then they would return home, the city and nation would be rebuilt,

and the Messiah would come to restore all things. "I am the Lord, God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for Me?" (32:27).

It goes even further than this. God said that He would break His covenant with the day and the night, so that they do not come in their usual schedule, before He would break His covenant with David, His promise to keep his descendants on the throne. He would no more reject His people that He would change the laws of earth and sky (33:19-21, 25).

Daily Reflection

Think about that for a minute. Since the beginning of time, the Lord established the laws of night and day, of earth and sky, that they would do what they do on a schedule, as it is with everything else in His universe. The constancy and consistency of the passing days, seasons, and years are **a testament of God's faithfulness**. How does this truth impact your daily life?

Everything has happened just as He said it would. What He says is true. Whatever He has promised, He will fulfill. **He has always been reliable and He will always be reliable**. Like night and day, you can count on Him, for He is faithful. Why, then, do people doubt Him, reject Him, or put their trust in something else?

Good and Evil

Today In Your Reading...

We advanced the story of the fall of Judah a little further. The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem was working; the famine in the city was severe. The last of the food was gone. At that time, King Zedekiah, his family, his staff, and his army snuck out of the city at night and made a run for it. However, Zedekiah, his sons, and some of his officials were captured. The King was judged and sentenced to prison in Babylon. However, Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons and staff and, then, removed Zedekiah's eyes.

The majority of our passage today was consumed with Ezekiel's messages to the King and city of Tyre, a world-famous port, known for its wealth, splendor, and dominance of the sea. God would destroy it because of the immorality of its people and the worship of their king. "In his pride he proclaimed, 'I am a god! I sit on the divine throne of the heart of the sea'" (28:2).

God was not impressed. "You are only a man and not a god..." He said. "Yes, your wisdom has made you rich, but your riches have made you very proud... Therefore, because you think you are as wise as a god, I will bring against you an enemy army. Will you then boast, 'I am a god' to those who will kill you? To them you will not be a god but merely a man" (28:5-9).

Since the days of Nimrod, the earth's first king (*Genesis 10:8-10*), **Satan has used human leaders to defy God's authority and enslave millions of people under his control.** The King of Tyre was no different. Thus, it is no surprise that he would proclaim himself to be a god. Didn't Pharaoh do the same thing in Egypt? Didn't Nebuchadnezzar do the same in Babylon? This is not a new phenomenon.

However, what is interesting is how God's message briefly turned its attention from the King of

Tyre to Satan himself. Though the message was to the city and its wicked monarch, the words seemed to fit our fallen foe. "You were the perfection of wisdom and beauty. You were in Eden, the Garden of God. I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God... You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day **evil was found in you**... You sinned, so I banished you from the mountain of God. I expelled you, O mighty guardian. **Your heart was filled with pride** because of all your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor, so I threw you to the earth..." (28:11-19).

Daily Reflection

Consider this, if everything was entirely good at creation, then *how was evil found in Satan or Lucifer?* The same question could be applied to the Garden of Eden. If everything was entirely good at creation, then *why was there a tree of the knowledge of good and evil?* Adam and Eve would not have known the meaning of evil if all were good, right?

One definition of evil is "any deviation that a moral agent — angel or human — makes from the rules prescribed to him by God" (*Webster's 1828 Dictionary*). The Lord created angels and humans entirely good, free from sin. However, He also gave them the *freedom of choice*, thus the purpose of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In their liberty, Lucifer, Adam, and Eve chose to defy God's authority and rebel against Him. *Their defiance is the nature of evil*, and their evil decisions had consequences — sin, sorrow, distress, injury, loss, calamity, etc.

Are you capable of evil, of deviating from God's will? Yes, we all are. In that we reflect the sin of our predecessors. Unfortunately, we too must live with the consequences of our choices.

The Queen of Nations

Today In Your Reading...

We were given more details about the third and final attack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, burned down the Temple, the royal palace, and all the houses of the city. He also supervised as the walls of the city were torn down. Most of the people were killed; the rest were exiled.

All of this destruction could have been averted. "The Lord repeatedly sent His prophets to warn the people, for He had compassion on them and His Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the Lord's anger could no longer be restrained and there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:15, 16).

Nebuzaradan did spare two people, in particular, for their faithfulness to God. He found Jeremiah among the exiles and released him. By order of King Nebuchadnezzar, he was free to go to Babylon or stay in Jerusalem. Jeremiah chose to stay in Jerusalem with the new governor, Gedaliah. The second person released was an Ethiopian eunuch named Ebed-melech. He was the man who spoke up for Jeremiah and had him removed from the cistern. "Because you trusted Me," said the Lord, "I will preserve your life and keep you safe" (Jeremiah 39:18).

Once he was released from exile, Jeremiah made note of the devastation and sorrow that surrounded the city of Jerusalem. His thoughts were collected in a book called *Lamentations*. "Once the Queen of nations, she is now a slave... for the Lord has punished Jerusalem for her many sins... Now she lies in the gutter with no one to lift her out... For all these things I weep. Tears flow down my cheeks. No one is here to comfort me; any who might encourage me are far away. My children have no future, for the enemy has conquered us" (1:1, 5, 9, 16).

An interesting statement to note is at the end of 2 Chronicles, "The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate for 70 years" (36:21). Remember, the law of the Sabbath Year was that the land was to be given rest every seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-7; 26:27-46). The people could only farm for six years at a time. The chronicler's statement suggests that the law of the Sabbath Year had not been honored for 490 years. Therefore, God exiled the people in order to let the land rest for 70 years. One way or another, the Lord keeps His people accountable to His laws. **They cannot be neglected without consequences.**

Daily Reflection

Several times in our nation's history, the Lord has kept us accountable for our sins and punished us for neglecting to deal with them. The most notable judgment is that of the Civil War. The sin of slavery had been planted by the enemy early in our history, but instead of uprooting it, part of our country preserved and promoted it. After 250 years, the Lord's patience had waned. He allowed our nation to be torn in two and enflamed in bloody war. More than 600,000 Americans died in four years, until slavery was finally abolished in 1865.

What national sins are we guilty of today?

Thomas Jefferson, one of our Founding Fathers, once wrote, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and that His justice cannot sleep forever." Though America, like Judah, was once the Queen of nations, **God's patience will one day give way to His justice.**