

Ezekiel 18:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

Analysis

The principle of individual accountability reaches climax: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Each person bears responsibility for their own sin. The phrase "the soul that sinneth" emphasizes personal agency. This doesn't contradict original sin or corporate solidarity but establishes individual judgment. The righteous person's righteousness benefits only themselves; the wicked person's wickedness condemns only themselves. This anticipates the Great White Throne judgment where each gives account personally (Revelation 20:12-13).

Historical Context

This clear statement (591 BC) corrected the exiles' misunderstanding of corporate judgment. While nations and families experience collective consequences, ultimate judgment is individual. Godly Josiah couldn't save Judah from his fathers' wickedness, nor did wicked Manasseh's idolatry doom his repentant son Josiah. Each stood before God based on personal covenant faithfulness. This principle shapes biblical justice—punishment falls on the guilty, not the innocent. While Christ bore our sins as substitute, individuals must personally trust Him for salvation.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge attempts to blame others for your spiritual condition?
2. What is the relationship between personal accountability and Christ bearing our sins as substitute?

Interlinear Text

הַנֶּפֶשׁ	הַחַטֵּאת	הָיָא	תָּמּוּת	הֵבֶן	לֹא	יִשָּׂא	בְּעוֹן
The soul	that sinneth	H1931	it shall die	The son	H3808	bear	the iniquity
H5315	H2398		H4191	H1121		H5375	H5771
וְאָבִי	וְאָבִי	לֹא	יִשָּׂא	בְּעוֹן	הֵבֶן		
neither shall the father	neither shall the father	H3808	bear	the iniquity	The son		
H1	H1		H5375	H5771	H1121		
צְדִיקָתוֹ	הַצְדִּיק	עַל	תְּהִיָּה				
the righteousness	of the righteous	H5921	H1961				
H6666	H6662						
וְרָשָׁעוֹ	רָשָׁע	עַל	תְּהִיָּה				
shall be upon him and the wickedness	of the wicked	H5921	H1961				
H7564	H7563						

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 24:16 (Sin): The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

2 Kings 14:6 (Sin): But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

Ezekiel 18:4 (Sin): 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.

2 Chronicles 25:4 (Sin): But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.

Matthew 16:27 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

1 Kings 8:32 (Righteousness): Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness.

Numbers 18:1 (Sin): And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.

Revelation 20:12 (Parallel theme): And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

2 Chronicles 6:23 (Righteousness): Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness.

Revelation 2:23 (Parallel theme): And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.