

Ezekiel 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

Analysis

This verse establishes prophetic accountability: "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning...his blood will I require at thine hand." The Hebrew phrase "his blood will I require" uses legal language of judicial responsibility. Ezekiel functions as a watchman (3:17) whose duty is warning, not converting. The wicked man's death results from his own sin, but the prophet's silence makes him complicit. This doesn't contradict sovereign election but emphasizes human responsibility in evangelism. The Reformed view of secondary causes appears: God ordains both the end (salvation/judgment) and the means (faithful witness).

Historical Context

The watchman metaphor drew from ancient Near Eastern practice where sentinels guarded city walls, alerting inhabitants to approaching danger. Failure to warn meant culpability for resulting deaths. Ezekiel ministered to exiles (593-571 BC) who faced spiritual death through persistent rebellion. The prophet's solemn responsibility was warning them of coming judgment. This passage shaped Jewish understanding of rabbinic duty and later influenced Christian views of pastoral accountability. The principle appears in Acts 20:26-27 where Paul declares himself "pure from the blood of all men" by faithfully proclaiming God's counsel.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the watchman principle shape your sense of responsibility to warn unbelievers of coming judgment?
2. What is the relationship between God's sovereign election and human responsibility to proclaim the gospel?

Interlinear Text

אַל אִם וְתַּשְׁעַ בְּאָמַר־

When I say from his wicked Thou shalt surely Thou shalt surely H3808
H559 H7563 H4191 H4191

לְפָזָה יְרֵא דְּבָרֶת אַל אַל לְפָזָה יְרֵא
and thou givest him not warning nor speakest and thou givest him not warning H2094
H2094 H1696 H3808

בְּשֻׁעַ הַאֲלֹפִית וְלְפָזָה מִדְרָכֶךָ וְבְשֻׁעַ
from his wicked way from his wicked to save his life H1931 from his wicked H7563
H7563 H1870 H7563 H2421

אַבְקָשׁ: מִדְבָּר יְהִי וְיִמְתַּחַד וְבְעָזֹב וְ
in his iniquity Thou shalt surely but his blood at thine hand will I require H1245
H5771 H4191 H1818 H3027

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 33:6 (Sin): But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person

from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

Ezekiel 3:20 (Sin): Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

Acts 2:40 (Salvation): And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Luke 13:5 (Parallel theme): I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

1 Timothy 4:16 (Salvation): Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

John 8:21 (Sin): Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.

Ezekiel 18:20 (Sin): 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.

Proverbs 14:32 (Evil): The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.

John 8:24 (Sin): I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

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.