

Ezekiel 3:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

God warns that even a righteous man can fall: "when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity...he shall die in his sin." This sobering warning addresses the danger of apostasy. The Hebrew *shub* (שׁוּב, "turn") indicates deliberate departure, not momentary lapse. The phrase "his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered" doesn't negate past grace but emphasizes that final apostasy proves saving faith was absent. The Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints maintains that true believers ultimately persevere, while those who utterly apostatize demonstrate they never possessed genuine faith (1 John 2:19).

Historical Context

This warning addressed exiles in Babylon (593 BC) who might have appeared righteous but lacked genuine heart transformation. Israel's history included many who began well but finished poorly—Saul, Solomon, and numerous kings who "did right...but the high places were not removed." The external righteousness of covenant membership didn't guarantee internal regeneration. Ezekiel's message anticipated Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-27, where God promises to write

His law on hearts and give a new spirit. The warning guards against presumption while emphasizing that genuine conversion produces persevering faith.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge presumptuous assurance based on past religious performance rather than present faith?
2. What is the relationship between genuine saving faith and final perseverance in holiness?

Interlinear Text

וְכַשׁ וּבִ	צַדִּיק	מִצְדִּיקוֹ	עָשָׂה	עַל	וְנָתַתִּי
Again	When a righteous	from his righteousness	and commit	iniquity	and I lay
H7725	H6662	H6664	H6213	H5766	H5414
מִכָּשׁ וּלְ	לִפְנֵי יוֹ	הָוָא	יָמָוֹת	כִּי	לֹא
a stumblingblock	before	H1931	he shall die	H3588	H3808
H4383	H6440	H4191			
הַזְהַרְתּוֹ	בְּחַטָּאתָו	יָמָוֹת	וְלֹא		
because thou hast not given him warning	in his sin	he shall die	H3808		
H2094	H2403	H4191			
תִּזְכָּר הָ	צְדִיקְתּוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	וְדָמָו	
shall not be remembered	and his righteousness	H834	and commit	but his blood	
H2142	H6666		H6213	H1818	
מִדָּבָר	אֶבְקֹשׁ:				
at thine hand	will I require				
H3027	H1245				

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 18:24 (Righteousness): But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

Ezekiel 3:18 (Sin): 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.

Hebrews 10:38 (Righteousness): Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

Psalms 125:5 (Sin): As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

Ezekiel 18:26 (Righteousness): 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.

1 John 2:19 (Parallel theme): They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Jeremiah 6:21 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will lay stumblingblocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish.

Ezekiel 33:18 (Righteousness): When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby.

1 Peter 2:8 (Parallel theme): And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Isaiah 64:6 (Righteousness): But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.