

Ezekiel 18v1-18—Repent, And Turn From All Your Wrongdoing, So That Guilt And Punishment Will Not Be Your Ruin—Part 1

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Revision: Last week we saw in Ezekiel 17 the contrast between Israel's unfaithfulness and treachery towards God and others, and God's faithfulness and loyalty to His covenant people. Again this is grace, God's faithfulness towards Israel in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness towards God. Just when Israel could go no lower, when it had almost ceased being a nation, God promises to one day make them the world superpower, with the Messiah, "a tender one" (v 22), leading the nation during the Millennial reign of Christ on earth. Again, Israel has done nothing to deserve this privilege.

The conclusion concerning Israel: Once God's chosen people, always God's chosen people.

The conclusion concerning believers today: Once a child of God, always a child of God.

This week: Ezekiel chapter 18 is best left to explain itself.

"Behold, all souls are mine ...the soul who sins shall die ...³⁰ "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!" (18:4, 30-32)

What we will see in this chapter is that every person has free choice, whether to turn (repent) and live or continue living in sin and die—we can't blame our choices on our circumstances or upbringing. Each one of us must make the choice to repent, because if we don't, there is no doubt that sin will be our ruin, both in this life and the next.

Ezekiel 18:1-18 NKJV

The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, ² "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?

³ "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.

⁴ "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.

⁵ But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right; ⁶ if he has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbour's wife, nor approached a woman during her impurity; ⁷ if he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to the debtor his pledge; has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; ⁸ if he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase, but has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man; ⁹ if he has walked in My statutes—and kept My judgments faithfully—he is just; he shall surely live!" says the Lord God.

¹⁰ “If he begets a son who is a robber or a shedder of blood, who does any of these things ¹¹ and does none of those duties, but has eaten on the mountains or defiled his neighbour’s wife; ¹² if he has oppressed the poor and needy, robbed by violence, not restored the pledge, lifted his eyes to the idols, or committed abomination; ¹³ if he has exacted usury or taken increase—shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.

¹⁴ “If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise; ¹⁵ who has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbour’s wife; ¹⁶ has not oppressed anyone, nor withheld a pledge, nor robbed by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; ¹⁷ who has withdrawn his hand from the poor and not received usury or increase, but has executed My judgments and walked in My statutes he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live!

¹⁸ “As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

Ezekiel 18:1-3 NKJV—A false proverb (a false doctrine or false teaching) refuted

The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, ² “What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’?

³ “As I live,” says the Lord God, “you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.

The basis of their complaint went something like this: It was our parents, the previous generation who sinned against God (**eaten sour grapes**), but we are the ones being punished (**teeth are set on edge**)—therefore God is unfair, both in *not punishing* the previous generation, and *in punishing* the current generation. Basically, the people of Judah were saying that if the parents had sinned (**eaten sour grapes**), then they should be the ones who were punished (**teeth are set on edge**). To the people of Ezekiel and Jeremiah’s day, it seemed that they were innocent and were being punished for the sins their fathers (the previous generations) committed.

You can understand why they would feel this way, after all, it was only in their generation that Jerusalem was subject to foreign powers, and to them, it would seem that they were no worse than their fathers. Of course they were wrong; as we have just studied, their generation was worse than even Sodom, and their sins made the gentiles blush. But this is what they thought about themselves nonetheless. The question is, what is the effect of such wrong thinking and bad doctrine or teaching that was being taught by the ungodly priests, leaders, and false prophets?

The proverb “reflects a materialistic fatalism, a resignation to immutable cosmic rules of cause and effect, an embittered paralysis of the soul, that has left the exiles without hope and without God [As you would expect one to feel if they believed that they were being punished for someone else’s sins].” (Block)

“Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel saw this as a pernicious [having a harmful effect] doctrine, because it inevitably led to a spirit of fatalism and irresponsibility. If the fault could really be laid at the door of a previous generation, those on whom the judgment was falling could reasonably shrug off any sense of sin and accuse God of injustice.” (Taylor)

“Men are still using this proverb, and so using it as to show that they think the saying is true. As a matter of fact, no saying more false was ever coined. It is based upon a one-sided philosophy of heredity. The proverb is at once an attempt to escape from responsibility for sin; and a protest against punishment” [I’m being punished for something that I didn’t do]. (Morgan)

Application: The modern version of this ancient proverb today is “generational curses”.

The false teaching or understanding of generational curses is where people believe that, for example, if the father is a drunkard, then the son will also be a drunkard. This comes from a misunderstanding of Exodus 20:4-6 (the second commandment) and Numbers 14:18. Unfortunately, many have been tripped up by this false doctrine and have ended up reacting in the same way as the nation of Judah did in Ezekiel’s day—I can’t help my sin (escape responsibility), it’s my parent’s fault. First let’s understand the scriptures.

Exodus 20:4-6 NKJV

You shall not make for yourself a carved image... For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting [punishing] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations **of those who hate Me**, ⁶ but showing mercy to thousands, **to those who love Me and keep My commandments** [God would much rather show mercy than have to judge people].

Numbers 14:18 NKJV

The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He **by no means clears the guilty**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation [who have not repented/are guilty].

Love Me... Hate Me...(Exodus 20:6): It seems those who quoted this wicked proverb and hoped to accuse God by it found refuge in twisting Exodus 20:4–6. “They had failed, as many do today, to see the force of the words ‘hate me’ and ‘love me.’ **Thus, if they individually loved God, they could not be suffering the penalty of their fathers’ sins.**” (Feinberg)

It’s important so see the clear meaning of what God is saying. Feinberg puts it well when he says, “**Thus, if they individually loved God, they could not be suffering the penalty of their fathers’ sins.**” Why not? Because that would be unjust. God will never punish the innocent, nor let the guilty go free—it’s completely against His nature as a righteous and just judge.

A cumulative disaster... —when nations (not individuals) continue in sin

“The second commandment (Exodus 20:5, 6) had spoken of the cumulative disaster that mounts up when **generation after generation refuses to repent**. This is also the teaching of Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:35, 36). **Ezekiel asserts that each generation is responsible for breaking the evil tradition or for maintaining the good one** [this is the main point of the rest of the chapter].” (Wright)

Let’s have a look at the teaching of Christ regarding this “cumulative disaster” or “generational curse”.

Matthew 23:29-39 NKJV—*A biblical example of a “generational curse”.*

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’

³¹ “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² **Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt.**
³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?
³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵ that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ **Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.**
³⁷ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! **How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!** ³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹ for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ”

What do we notice here? Have the Jewish leaders repented of their pride and rebellion against God?—No. Were they guilty of the same sins?—Yes. Were they guilty of more or less of those same sins?—More. Also notice that this was cumulative judgement on a national level, not an individual level. Remember that many of those leaders did actually repent and receive God’s gracious forgiveness, Nicodemus being a prime example.

The same cumulative disaster or generational curse applies to today’s nations, with all the murder, abortion, violence, sexual perversion, lies, deception, disrespect of authority, and general godlessness we see today. Instead of responding with repentance and humility like the people of Nineveh did when Jonah preached to them, today’s nations only get all the more wicked as they continue to harden themselves against the truth of God’s Word. Therefore, just like the nation of Judah was doing, they are making ourselves more and more ripe for judgement, which for them will be in the form of the imminent seven year Tribulation.

So now we understand the proper biblical understanding of “generational curses”—they apply to nations and not individuals. Concerning individuals, God says, “All souls are Mine”, and “The soul who sins shall die”. The rest of Ezekiel chapter 18 is a point by point rebuttal of individual generational curses, which we have read and will study as we get into it. But first, let’s take a look at today’s attempted justification of generational curses. Here’s a very clear quote from GotQuestions.org concerning this lie.

“Some “deliverance ministries” and Charismatic groups teach the existence of hereditary spirits, also called generational spirits or familial spirits. These entities are thought to be evil spirits that attach themselves to a particular family and harass them through multiple generations. They are demons inherited from one’s ancestors.

Those who teach the existence of hereditary spirits consider them the source of various sins such as pride, lust, perversion, anger, rebellion, fear, and addiction. Generational or hereditary spirits are blamed for “generational curses” that result in poverty, sickness, disease, confusion, failure, and even death. According to the concept of generational spirits, a man struggles with anger issues because he’s being influenced by an “anger demon”—the same demon who provoked his father and grandfather to anger. A woman who struggles with depression is being oppressed by a “depression demon” that was invited into the family by the sin of an ancestor—one who practiced witchcraft, perhaps. Once attached to the family, the demon causes trouble down the lineage.

Usually, deliverance ministries recommend that a person renounce the generational spirits and all the curses his or her family is under, “binding” and “rebuking” all the demons, ordering sickness away, etc. (This must be done out loud, so the demons can hear the rebuke.) The idea is that one must cast out all the demons and break all pacts with the devil made by ancestors. Only then is one free to grow spiritually in Christ.

The idea of hereditary spirits or generational spirits has more in common with paganism than it does with the Bible. Neo-pagans and Wiccans readily admit a belief in generational curses, demons that attach themselves to a certain family, and the idea that occult power can be passed down through one’s family line. In paganism, breaking a generational curse often involves working with one’s (dead) ancestors.

The teaching of generational spirits has no biblical foundation. Some try to defend a belief in generational spirits by pointing to passages such as Deuteronomy 5:9, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” However, it’s important to note that this passage (and others such as Exodus 20:5 and Numbers 14:18) does not mention any spirits. We might call God’s punishment here a “generational curse,” but the text references no generational or hereditary spirit. God was disciplining the rebellious in Israel, but demons are not said to be involved.

The effects of sin (specifically idolatry in Deuteronomy 5) are naturally passed down from one generation to the next. God’s punishment of someone’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren has nothing to do with familial demons and everything to do with the consequence of bad choices that affect others in the family. Any type of sinful choice can possibly impact several generations of one’s offspring and cause much suffering.

Further, when a father has a sinful lifestyle, his children are likely to practice the same sinful lifestyle. Implied in the warning of Exodus 20:5 is the fact that children will choose to repeat the sins of their fathers. God promises to punish sin to the third or fourth generation because those generations are committing the same sins their fathers did. But nothing in the Mosaic Law suggests a demon attaching itself to a family.” (Got questions.org)

Does experiencing the negative consequences of someone else’s sin mean I am being punished for their sin?

While it is true that the children of the drunkard father suffer because of the drunkard father’s sins, they are not actually being punished by God for their father’s sins, rather they just experience the negative effects or consequences which are a result of their father’s sins. We all experience this on an everyday basis as we are almost continuously negatively affected by other people’s sins. However, if those children make a conscious choice to ignore the plain warning in front of them—this is the path, life and misery of a drunkard—and instead *choose* to become a drunkard, then they will suffer the same consequences of sin as their drunkard father—they have chosen to love sin and hate God, and will have to give an account of their life to God for all the times they disobeyed God, and all the times their sinful behaviour affected those around them—then they will be punished by God for eternity. Whereas the person who looks at their drunkard father’s lifestyle and wisely avoids it (which may take time), they have chosen to hate the sin and love God, and so will experience God’s blessing instead.

Keep in mind that I'm not promoting works based salvation, but rather the person who is saved will produce, over time, the "fruits of righteousness" as they are transformed into the image of Christ. "*Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*" (Philippians 1:11).

Ezekiel 18:4 NKJV—The answer to the false proverb

Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.

v 4 **Behold, all souls are Mine:** This is an important principle—"all souls belong to God, this includes the souls of the fathers as well as the children. Since all souls belong to God because He is the Creator/Owner of us, then He has absolute authority over us, and, therefore, we are fully accountable to Him. Therefore, every guilty person will be judged—none will escape.

Is God referring only to physical death, or eternal death? "Some believe that Ezekiel only dealt with physical life or death in these passages. The problem with this is that surely, there were relatively good and innocent people who physically died in the judgment that came upon Jerusalem and Judea. The book of Job and all our personal experience teach us that sometimes the wicked prosper in this life and the righteous suffer. Ezekiel must have the eternal life and death of people primarily in mind." (David Guzik)

Three examples that demonstrate our freedom of choice to choose good or evil

God now uses three scenarios or examples to make His point which historically represent Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah:

1. A righteous man—Hezekiah (18:5–9)
2. Hezekiah's wicked son—Manasseh—(18:10–13)
3. Manasseh's righteous grandson—Josiah—(18:14–18)

1. Ezekiel 18:5-9—The promise of life to the righteous man (Hezekiah)

⁵ But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right; ⁶ if he has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbour's wife, nor approached a woman during her impurity; ⁷ if he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to the debtor his pledge; has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; ⁸ if he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase, but has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man; ⁹ if he has walked in My statutes—and kept My judgments faithfully—he is just; he shall surely live!" says the Lord God.

v 5,9 **But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right... He is just; he shall surely live!" Says the Lord God:** Notice the contrast between verse 4 and verses 5-9—the soul who sins shall die, but the soul who is just shall live. Again, this would indicate that this referring to eternal life and death. So what does a just man who does what is lawful and right look like? We can apply this to ourselves—if we are really a Christian with a new heart and new desires, then we should be displaying similar character traits to a greater and greater extent as we grow and mature in Christ.

v 6 **If he has not eaten on the mountains:** This refers to the high places or places of pagan worship where they would eat the meals that accompanied the sacrifices made to the idols—a *picture of fellowship with, and enjoyment of, this evil world system*.

v 6 **Nor lifted up his eyes to the idols:** He does not raise high, exalt, or have a longing for the idols that the rest of the nation (world) worshipped—instead the man of God lifts up his eyes to God and exalts and longs for God and the things of God. The application here would be that the man of God does not love the things (idols) of the world and therefore does not make himself an enemy of God (see James 4:4)

v 6 **Nor defiled his neighbour's wife:** Sexual purity is a mark of the man (and women) of God. Sex is reserved for the bond of marriage.

v 6 **Nor approached a woman during her impurity:** Leviticus 15:19–31 describes the laws of ritual purity where a woman was considered unclean for the duration and seven days after her period.

v 7 **If he has not oppressed anyone:** Deuteronomy 24:14-15 instructs to not oppress the poor by holding back his wages, but rather give him his wages that same day so he can buy food.

v 7 **But has restored to the [poor] debtor his pledge:** Usually the most valuable possession a poor man had was his only warm or thick garment that he would require at night to keep warm. As an act of mercy, God instructed the lender to restore the poor lender's pledge each night (Deuteronomy 24:12–13). Likewise the man of God should look for ways to show mercy to those around us.

v 7 **Has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing:** The man of God does not steal, but rather seeks to give generously (see Ephesians 4:28).

v 8 **If he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase:** The Israelites were allowed to charge interest on money loaned to foreigners, but not to other Jews (see Exodus 22:25, Deuteronomy 23:20, and Isaiah 24:2). Often in greed the rich Jews would lend money at high interest rates to the poor, and they could never pay it back. The man of God obeys God's commands regarding financial dealings with others and honours God with his money.

v 8 **But has withdrawn his hand [repented] from iniquity [perversity, injustice, dishonesty, depravity, wickedness]:** “*withdrawn*” in the Hebrew literally means to have turned around or repented. Thus, the man of God has repented, and continues to repent of his sin (perversity, injustice, dishonesty, depravity, wickedness).

v 8 **And executed true judgment [justice] between man and man:** The man of God is just and righteous in his dealings with others and between others (no favouritism or partiality—see James 2:1-9).

v 9 **If he has walked (to go after, follow, and pursue) in My statutes and kept (watch over or guard) My judgments faithfully:** All the previous points were examples of keeping God's law, the covenant He made with Israel in the days of Moses. Remember that the law can be summed up by, “love God and love others.” Jesus also commanded His followers who live under the New Covenant to be known by their love one for another (see John 13:35).

v 9 **He is just** [Hebrew: *not guilty, innocent, in the right*]; **he shall surely live**: The person who loves God will live a life that pleases God, it's that simple. Back then, they, by faith, looked forward to the promised Saviour that would one day come and take away the sins of the world. Those who understood their sinfulness, and trusted in the coming Saviour, were full of appreciation of what God was going to do for them and therefore willingly obeyed Him, willingly repented of their sin, and willingly said "no" to the temporary or passing pleasures of sin (see Hebrews 11:25). The same is true of the man of God today who remembers the sacrifice paid on His behalf (see 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). *The point here is that the good works are evidence of a genuine saving faith in God, and those who are genuinely saved will live with God forever.*

2. Ezekiel 18:10-13 NKJV—The wicked son of the righteous father

"If he begets a son who is a robber or a shedder of blood, who does any of these things ¹¹ and does none of those duties, but has eaten on the mountains or defiled his neighbour's wife; ¹² if he has oppressed the poor and needy, robbed by violence, not restored the pledge, lifted his eyes to the idols, or committed abomination; ¹³ if he has exacted usury or taken increase—shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.

v 10 **If he begets a son who is a robber or a shedder of blood**: Here the righteous man referred to in Ezekiel 18:5–9 (Hezekiah) has a son (Manasseh) who *chooses* not to follow his godly father's example.

In verses 10-13 Ezekiel goes through the same list of examples as in the previous section:

- Did he participate in idol worship on the mountains?—yes
- Did he lift up his eyes to idols?—yes
- Was he sexually pure?—no
- Did he approach a woman during her impurity?—yes
- Did he oppress anyone?—yes
- Did he in mercy restore the pledge to the poor debtor?—no
- Did he rob anyone with violence?—yes
- Did he take advantage of his countrymen by charging interest on loans?—yes
- Did he withdraw his hand from sin?—no
- Did he execute true justice?—no

In each detail we see that the unrighteous man is the opposite of the righteous man. Why?—because he doesn't love God and is therefore focused on living for himself, without a care for God or others.

v 13 **Shall he then live? He shall not live!**: Though he had a great example to follow, his righteous father's righteousness would not help him—he would have to answer for and be responsible for his own sin.

v 13 **He shall surely die, his blood shall be upon him**: In other words, the wicked man ate the sour grapes and it will be his teeth that are set on edge [not his son's].

3. Ezekiel 18:14-18 NKJV—The righteous grandson (Josiah) of the wicked father (Manasseh)

¹⁴ “If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise; ¹⁵ who has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbour’s wife; ¹⁶ has not oppressed anyone, nor withheld a pledge, nor robbed by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; ¹⁷ who has withdrawn his hand from the poor and not received usury or increase, but has executed My judgments and walked in My statutes he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live!

¹⁸ “As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

v 14, 17 **If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done and considers but does not do likewise... he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live!**: God gives every man free choice.

For the child growing up in a godly family, the disadvantage is that he may not have had firsthand experience of just how destructive and painful sin is, and may therefore be tempted to go down that path as they see others enjoying the short term pleasures of sin.

For the child growing up in an ungodly family, they know first hand just how horrible it is to live selfishly in a selfish family, and if they have any common sense, they will want to leave that way of life behind them. Josiah was one of these wise children.

In verses 15-17 Ezekiel goes through the same list of examples as in the previous sections:

- Did he participate in idol worship on the mountains?—no
- Did he lift up his eyes to idols?—no
- Was he sexually pure?—yes
- Did he approach a woman during her impurity?—no
- Did he oppress anyone?—no
- Did he in mercy restore the pledge to the poor debtor?—yes
- Did he rob anyone with violence?—no
- Did he take advantage of his countrymen by charging interest on loans?—no
- Did he withdraw his hand from sin?—yes
- Did he execute true justice?—yes

v 17 **He shall not die for the iniquity of the father**: Because God is just and fair, the righteous son will not suffer for the sins of the father. In light of the proverb, because he didn’t eat the sour grapes (sin), his teeth will not be set on edge (punishment).

Deuteronomy 24:16 NKJV

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.

v 18 **But as for his father**: The opposite is also true, the righteousness of the godly son will not justify the wicked father—the wicked father would die for his own personal sins. The wicked father ate the sour grapes (sinned), and so *his* teeth would be set on edge (he would be punished).

Conclusion—living faith leads to living works (see James 2:14-26)

It's important that we understand that we cannot and are not saved by doing good deeds or works. However, we must also be aware that a person who is truly saved, who has a living faith—they have the Holy Spirit living inside of them producing or creating in them the desire to love and obey God, will at least to some degree produce good works as a fruit of their salvation.

The Jews of Ezekiel's day were all very religious, trusting in the temple of God and its associated religious activities—but were also very ungodly. God has been showing them that their actions betrayed or revealed the true condition of their hearts—being hard and unrepentant. Religious activities are no substitute for a heart that is right with God—it's the difference between eternal life with God and eternal death in the Lake of Fire. Look for the links between faith and works in the passages below.

Matthew 7:21-27 AMP

Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father** Who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name and driven out demons in Your name and done many mighty works in Your name? ²³ And then I will say to them openly (publicly), I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who act wickedly** [disregarding My commands]. [Ps. 6:8.]

²⁴ So everyone who hears these words of Mine and **acts upon them [obeying them]** will be like a sensible (prudent, practical, wise) man who built his house upon the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of Mine and **does not do them** will be like a stupid (foolish) man who built his house upon the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house, **and it fell—and great and complete was the fall of it.**

James 2:14-26 NLT (read verse 23 first)

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of [dead] faith save anyone? ¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it **[faith] produces** good deeds, it is dead and useless.

¹⁸ Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, **"How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."**

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰ How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is [dead] useless?

²¹ Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham **was shown to be right with God by his actions [his actions demonstrated the genuineness of his faith]** when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete [mature or perfect]. ²³ And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: **"Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."** He was even called the friend of God. ²⁴ **So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone** (see v 18).

²⁵ Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was **shown to be right with God by her actions** when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.

²⁶ **Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.**