

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
October 8, 2016**

Ezekiel 17:1–18:32. Judgment, virtue vs. vice.

Revelation 7:9–8:13. The seven seals.

Job 34:16–30. The justice and love of God.

COMMENTS.

Ezekiel 17:1–18:32. In **chapter 17** the Lord introduces another parable to illustrate truths concerning Jerusalem. A powerful eagle came to Lebanon, broke off the top branch of a cedar, transported it to a city of merchants, and planted it there. This eagle also took some seeds from the land of Israel and planted them in fertile soil, where they grew into a vine with leafy branches. However, when another mighty eagle approached, the vine’s roots and branches grew toward him. The Lord then announced that the vine would be destroyed by the east wind. According to the interpretation of the parable (**17:11–18**), the first eagle represents Nebuchadnezzar, who carried away to Babylon Jerusalem’s king and several nobles. Reference is made to the deportation of Jehoiachin and others in 597 B.C. The planting of the vine represents the preservation of a remnant in Judah, headed up by Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar appointed as his vassal king. The second eagle symbolizes Egypt, to whom Judah looked for assistance when it decided to rebel against the Babylonians. The destruction of the vine points to the demise of Judah, which the Babylonians would severely punish for their rebellion. However, the future was not entirely bleak. The Lord would break a branch from the top of a cedar and plant it on a high mountain, where it would grow into a large and fruitful tree. In **chapter 18** God’s people were quoting a proverb that suggested they were suffering unjustly for the sins of earlier generations. The Lord corrected their faulty thinking. He always preserves the righteous and opposes the wicked, regardless of the moral status of their fathers. To illustrate His point the Lord described a hypothetical righteous man who repudiates idolatry, adultery, and injustice. Such a man can be assured of divine protection. However, if this man has an idolatrous, adulterous, unjust son, this evil child will be destroyed despite his father’s righteousness. Again if this wicked man has a son who is righteous, that son will not be held accountable for his father’s evil deeds. Instead, like his grandfather, his life will be preserved by the Lord. Each man is judged on the basis of his own deeds, not those of his father. The lesson for Israel was obvious. If they were experiencing divine judgment, it had to mean that they, like their fathers, were evil. Rather than complaining that God is unjust, they had to repent and turn from their wicked ways, for God desired that they live, not die. As you read this chapter, you find the prophet answering the erroneous statements the Jewish exiles were making about God and their difficult situation (2, 19, 25, 29). God knew what His people were saying and so did His prophet. Ignoring the inspired Word of God, the people were building their case on a popular proverb: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” In other words, “Our fathers have sinned and we, their children, are being punished for it.” Their philosophy was a kind of irresponsible fatalism. “No matter what we do,” they argued, “we still have to suffer because of what the older generation did.”

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. In **18:7-9** Ezekiel lists eight vices and eight virtues. The vices include idolatry, adultery, unclean worship, exploiting people, and putting profit above people. The virtues include returning a debtor's pledge, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked (**7**), living justly and promoting justice (**8**), living by God's statutes and obeying His ordinances, and living with integrity (**9**). Note that man with virtue acted as he did because he loved God and had "a new heart and a new spirit" within him (**31**). He put God first in his life, treated people with kindness and mercy, and used his material wealth to honor God and serve others. As evidence of his faith in God, he obeyed the two great commandments of the law, to love the Lord and to love fellow human beings (Matt. 22:34-40). Again and again, we see that it always comes back to life with God *by knowledge and by love*. And vice is always a result of not walking with the Lord *by knowledge and by love*. Failure to walk with the Lord *by proper knowledge and by love* results in a blindness to one's own culpability in his own suffering for failure to put the Lord and His Word first and foremost in the life. In sum, most of those who constantly carp and complain and ask 'why does this always happen to me?' have an eerie blindness to their own rejection of God's love and Word.

Revelation 7:9-8:13. As the Lamb opens each of the first four seals, a horse and rider gallop out. The first horse is white and its rider is given power to wage war and conquer kingdoms. The second horse is a fiery red and its rider is given power to shed blood. The third horse is black and its rider holds a pair of scales. He will spread famine on earth, with shortage of food and high prices. But oil and wine will be spared—a reminder that some people will continue to live in luxury while many starve. The fourth horse is pale and its rider is death. Together these four riders—the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'—bring terror and suffering, dearth and death. As each rides out, one of the four living creatures calls, 'Come!' It is a cry of longing that Christ will rescue his people from these terrible events. When the fifth seal is opened, John sees all the people who have been martyred for their faith. They are themselves sacrifices under the altar of heaven, and cry to God that he will avenge their murder. As John watches, they are each given a white robe—the livery of heaven—and encouraged to wait a little longer. When the sixth seal is opened, the entire universe is brought to an end. Everyone—high and low, rich and poor—is engulfed in the cataclysm of Judgment Day. This is the day when the full power and wrath of Christ is unveiled and unleashed—the day of the wrath of the Lamb! Jesus had predicted this cosmic collapse with all its darkness and terror when talking to his disciples (Matthew 24). The description of the stars falling like withered figs goes all the way back to a prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 34:4). The opening of the scroll has revealed the sufferings which will afflict and eventually engulf the world. These are: military aggression, human bloodshed, shortage of food and death by starvation and disease. Far from being excluded from the suffering of humankind, God's people will be caught up in it and even suffer martyrdom as well.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. In this section we have the sealed Jews (7:1-8). In Scripture, a seal indicates ownership and protection. Today, God's people are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). This is God's guarantee that we are saved and safe, and that He will one day take us to Heaven. Eternal security speaks of God's righteousness, love, and commitment to us no matter what. Such a love is a powerful motivation to love Him instead of fearing Him. It really is all about grace and His love: 1 John 4:19, *We love Him because He first loved us.* Walking with God *by proper knowledge and by proper love* is simply a response to His love. Moreover, it is its own reward.

Job 34:16-30. Elihu continues arguing that the Governor of the universe cannot be unrighteous. God is righteous and mighty (17). He has the power to judge kings and nobles (18), to shatter them without need of investigation (24) since He already knows their steps (21). He can overturn them in the night (25). His works of might are in strict accord with his justice. He shows no favoritism to princes or the rich (19), He rewards people according to their deeds (25) and strikes wrongdoers down for their wickedness (26) because they have disobeyed his laws (27) and oppressed the poor (28). So if ever God is silent and does not offer a vindication when it is called for, who can condemn him and say that what He does is unjust (29)? The Book of Job magnifies the sovereignty of God. From the very first chapter, it is obvious that God is in control; for even Satan is told what he can and cannot do. During the debate, it appears that God is absent; but He is aware of how Job feels and what Job and his friends say. Thirty-one times in the Book of Job, God is called "the Almighty." Elihu was right on target: God is sovereign and cannot do wrong. However, Elihu was wrong in not speaking of the love of God.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Elihu made a big mistake in emphasizing the divine attribute of justice of God: neglect of God's love. God is loving and gracious. The attribute of love is conspicuously absent through these speeches. God would take care of this problem in His speech, and in doing so will resolve the issue for Job and all who will listen. Yes, God does judge those who rebel against Him, but His love and grace is always there for anyone who will accept Him. Moreover, in His wisdom, God devised a plan of redemption that satisfies both His justice and His love (Rom. 3:21-31). Because of the Cross, God can redeem sinners and still magnify His righteousness and uphold His holy law. Only by walking with God *by proper knowledge and by proper love* can the believer live in the blessedness of grace, which when properly understood always brings with it an appreciate of His righteousness and unconditional love.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don