

When Theology Fails
Ezekiel's Final Debate with His Compatriots in Babylon
Ezekiel 33:10–20
Veritas Adult Community
February 20, 2021

The First Disputation

¹⁰ Now you, human, say to the house of Israel as follows: “This is what you have said, ‘Certainly our crimes and our sins are upon us, and because of them we are wasting away. How then shall we survive?’”¹

¹¹ Say to them, “As I live”—the declaration of the Lord YHWH—“I find no pleasure in the death of the **wicked**, but in the **wicked** person’s turning from his way so he may live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, so why should you die, O house of Israel?”

¹² Now you human, say to your compatriots, “The righteousness of the righteous person will not save him at the time he commits a crime. Nor will the **wickedness** of the **wicked** trip him up at the time he turns away from his **wickedness**. As for the righteous person, he will not survive on account of it at the time he sins. ¹³ Suppose I say of the righteous, “He shall surely live,” and he, counting on his righteousness, commits evil. Then none of his righteous actions will be credited [to him]. As for the evil he has perpetrated, for it he will die.

¹⁴ But suppose I say to the wicked, “You shall surely die,” and he then turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness. ¹⁵ The wicked person returns a pledge; he makes restitution for his robbery; he pursues the statutes of life; he refuses to practise evil—he shall surely live; he shall not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins that he has perpetrated will be charged against him. Since he has practiced justice and righteousness, he shall surely live.

The Second Disputation

¹⁷ But your compatriots say, “The action of the Lord is unscrupulous!”

But they are the ones whose action is unscrupulous. ¹⁸ If a righteous person turns from his righteousness and practises evil, on account of it he shall die. ¹⁹ But if a wicked person turns from his wickedness and practises justice and righteousness, on account of these deeds he shall live. ²⁰ But you insist, “The action of the Lord is unscrupulous.” I will judge each person on the basis of his actions, O house of Israel!

Exposition

Introduction

A. The First Disputation (vv. 10–16)

1. The People’s Quotation (v. 10)

“Certainly our crimes and our sins are upon us,
and because of them we are wasting away.
How then shall we survive?”

2. The Prophet’s Response (vv. 11—16)

a. The Refutation: (v.11)

- YHWH delights in life not death
- YHWH longs for sinners to repent and live.

b. The Counter-Thesis (vv. 12–16)

It is not how people begin their lives, but how they end that determines their destiny.

- The Case of the “Repentant” Righteous (vv. 12–13).
- The Case of the Repentant Wicked (vv. 14–16)

B. The Second Disputation (vv. 17–20)

1. The People’s Rejoinder (v. 10)

“The Action of the Lord is unscrupulous.”

2. The Prophet’s Response (vv. 18–10)

a. The Refutation (vv. 18–19)

It is not how people begin their lives, but how they end that determines their destiny.

b. The Counter-Thesis (v. 20)

YHWH always judges people on the basis of their actions—you are what you do!

C. Lessons from Ezekiel Disputation with His Compatriots

1. Hardened human hearts are unable to comprehend the things of God.
2. In his administration of justice God fundamentally desires life, even of the wicked, not their death.
3. Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine of eternal security and/or eternal damnation that would hold a person captive to the decisions of the past.
4. Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that would accuse God of unscrupulosity and capriciousness.
5. Ezekiel repudiates the common modern notion that God judges people on the basis of their hearts, rather than their actions.
6. Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine of ministry that encourages a prophet to proclaim only what people want to hear.