

Generational sin

Exodus 20:4-6 (NKJV)

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;
5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting 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.

Bad interpretation

It is typically taught from Exodus 20, which is the Ten Commandments. Someone teaches that “the sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation.” What this is commonly said to mean is that you may have ancestral curses because of the activities of your fathers, your ancestors. Usually, these activities have to do with extreme sin or occult involvement, but it may also be having an abortion. This then results in something bad happening to an individual because of this other person’s sinful activity.

The application of this is that someone is going through something really hard and has a besetting sin or problem that they can’t get rid of, and it is suggested to them that there is a spiritual dynamic that is tied to the teaching of this verse. There is a generational sin and curse that then must be broken. It is qualified that through some spiritual exercise or prayer the person can be free from this curse. Some have gone to great extent, written whole books, on how to unwind this spiritual oppression coming from past generations. They step you through all these little exercises. However they are mistaken.

Let’s look at the Scripture again

Who is doing the visiting?

Let’s break down the scripture to get a proper interpretation. The visiting of the sins of the father on the children, who is the active agent? It is God, right? God is doing the visiting. So, if you have a technique to undo this activity, who are you fighting against? You would be fighting against God.

Visiting the iniquity is not causing a person to sin

Visiting the iniquity cannot mean a curse or sin that is passed down from generation to generation. That would make God the cause of that person’s sin. God does not cause people to sin nor does He tempt them.

James 1:13-14 (NKJV)

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

This could not be a curse on Christians. Look at the qualifier. This punishment is on those who "*hate me*". Do Christians fall into the category of people who hate God? No, of course not. Think about it. Would God cause a Christian or even a non-Christian to sin? Would He punish a person for what their parent or grand parent did?

God does not punish children for the sins of the parents

Deuteronomy 24:16 (NKJV)

16 "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.

God addresses this false notion in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 18:20 (NKJV)

20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

What then does visiting the iniquity mean in this context and the rest of the Bible? It means that God is punishing someone. Who does He punish? He punishes those who hate Him. God punishes those who continually break the second commandment that one should not worship any other god especially an idol.

Remember in context these are the commandments that God is giving to Israel. In context this is a covenant with the Jews.

Therefore God is punishing a nation.

He is not perpetuating a sin from one generation to the next. God even gives them an example in this very book of visiting

Deuteronomy 11:16-17 (NKJV)

16 Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them,

17 lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.

When a nation is punished every living generation is affected from the father to the great grandson.

We have other Scripture confirming our interpretation of this verse. Look at Ex. 32:34.

Exodus 32:34 (NKJV)

34 Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.”

Look at the preceding verse. God does visit punishment on people but for their sin not another’s sin.

Deuteronomy 23:1-8 (NKJV)

1 “He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.

2 “One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord.

3 “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever,

4 because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

5 Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.

6 You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.

7 “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land.

8 The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord.

When God visits the sin it means God will **punish** not **perpetuate** a sin on innocent Christians. What does God do to Christians or those who love Him?

He will show lovingkindness to thousands to those who love Him and keep His commandments. He’s emphasizing His longsuffering and His mercy over and against His justice and wrath.