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**Sins  
of the  
Fathers  
passed onto their  
Children**

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

# Sins of the Fathers Passed onto their Children.

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## Topics.

- The meaning of father in the Bible.
- Fathers have eaten sour grapes.
- The character of God.
- God, visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children.

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## THE MEANING OF FATHER IN THE BIBLE

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Micah asks a Levite man, to be to him a priest and father.

- **Judges 17:10-11:** And Micah said to him, “Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.” And the Levite went in. <sup>11</sup> And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons.

The title ‘father’ is often used in the Bible as a term of endearment, and was given to spiritual authorities as the following verses show:

- **2 Kings 2:12:** And Elisha saw it (Elijah going up in a whirlwind) and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more.

In this verse, the expression, ‘my father,’ is an expression that shows that the one calling them father looks up to them with great respect, and as their superior.

- **2 Kings 5:13:** But his (Elisha’s) servants came near and said to him, “My father, it is a great word the prophet (Elijah) has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” (2 Kings 5:13).

In this verse, the expression, ‘My father,’ is an expression that shows that those calling him father look to him as being a man that is superior to them and a man that treats them with kindness.

- **2 Kings 6:21:** As soon as the king of Israel saw them (the Syrians that had been blinded), he said to Elisha, “My father, shall I strike them down?”

In this verse, the expression, ‘My father,’ is an expression of exaltation for a man who had brought about a supernatural favour.

- **Isaiah 22:21:** I will clothe him (the LORD’S servant Eliakim) with your robe (Shebna’s), and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

In this verse, the expression, “father,” carries the idea of man having a caring nature and who has authority over a nation.

From these verses we learn that the title, ‘father’ was given to spiritual authorities, and carries the idea of, superiority, endearment, kindness, caring, exaltation, great respect, and great authority (especially over a nation).

(2 Kings 2:12) (2 Kings 5:13) (2 Kings 6:21) (Isaiah 22:21).

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## FATHERS HAVE EATEN SOUR GRAPES

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Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

- **Ezekiel 18:1-4:** The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? <sup>3</sup> As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. <sup>4</sup> 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.

The expression, “fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge,” was a proverb used by the following two groups of people:

1. The wicked used it when they murmured against God's judgments that the prophets pronounced. It carries the idea Israel’s fathers had committed great sin, and the children were being punished for it.
2. The children born during the seventy-year Babylonian captivity used it to express that they were suffering the consequences of their father’s sins rather than their own.

The children born in during the Babylonian Captivity used it as a proverb, because the LORD had said, “He will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation.” Some may feel this is unfair, but this is not the end of the story, see the title: “God, visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children.” (below).

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## THE CHARACTER OF GOD

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When the LORD in a cloud passed by Moses on Mount Sinai, He declared He was:

- **Exodus 34:5-7:** the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth; <sup>7</sup>who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

Moses called upon the name of the LORD, and the LORD descends in a cloud, and as He passes by Moses, and proclaims that the LORD:

- Is compassionate and gracious.
- Is slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth.
- Shows loving kindness to thousands and forgives iniquity and sin.
- Does not let the guilty go unpunished.

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## GOD, VISITS THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS ON THE CHILDREN

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**Sins of the fathers passed onto the children:** since there has been much confusion over the words, “The LORD will visit the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations,” we will take a little time out to discover what this means.

To gain and insight and some understanding we will start by looking at the following verses which show two aspects of God's character which are justice and love as revealed in the following:

1. God will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Him and by no means clear the guilty. (v6-7).
2. God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness forgiving iniquity and transgression of thousands, who love Him and keep His commandments. (v6-7).

This verse, and the following verses clearly show each individual person will be judged and held accountable for their own sin.

- **Numbers 14:18:** The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation'.
- **Deuteronomy 5:9-10:** You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>10</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**NOTICE:** the punishment of the fathers' iniquity and transgression is only passed on to those the children who are guilty, rebellious and hate the LORD and continue to follow on in the same sins that that their rebellious fathers did. If they repent and turn from the wicked ways of their fathers God's forgiveness abounds, for He loves those who do what is right and those who love and honour Him.

**Children will not suffer for the sins of the fathers:** the following verses show that children will not suffer for the sins of their fathers nor will the fathers suffer for the iniquity of their sons and show that everyone will die for their own sin, and that the wicked will die for their own wickedness and everyone will be judged according to their own actions.

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- **Deuteronomy 24:16:** Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin (Deuteronomy 24:16).
- **Jeremiah 32:18:** You show steadfast love to thousands, but you *repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them*, O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts, <sup>19</sup>great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, *rewarding each one according to his ways* and according to the fruit of his deeds.

The following verses clearly show each individual person will be judged and held accountable for their own sin.

- **Ezekiel 18:20:** The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.
- **Ezekiel 18:24:** But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.
- **Ezekiel 18:26-27:** When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. <sup>27</sup>Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life.
- **Ezekiel 18:30:** Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD.

These verses shine a spotlight on the following four truths:

1. Every man and woman will be judged according to their own sin no parent will be judged because of the bad behaviour of their children, and no child will be judged because of the corrupt behaviour of their parents. Everyone will be rewarded or judge according to their own ways and their own good deeds or lack of them.
2. God's judgment of the wickedness of the wicked will be upon them and them only, and the reward of the righteous will be upon them and them only. No one's righteousness will advantage another, likewise no one's wickedness will disadvantage other at judgment.
3. When a righteous person turns away from their righteousness and turns to injustice and wickedness none of their righteous deeds will be remembered at judgment, they will die for the sin they have committed.
4. If a wicked person turns away from their wickedness and does what is just and right, they will save their life.

**THE FINAL CONCLUSION:** the LORD will judge every one according to his or her ways.

**The fathers have eaten sour grapes:** Jeremiah wrote:

- **Jeremiah 31:29-30:** In those days they shall no longer say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."<sup>30</sup> But everyone shall die for his own sin. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

The words, "in those days," refers to: the days God watched over Israel to rebuild their homes, cities, Jerusalem, and the LORD'S temple after their seventy years in captivity in Babylon. The words, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" means the fathers have done wrong and the children are suffering for it.

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It was a proverb used by the following two groups of people:

1. The children born during the seventy-year Babylonian captivity used it because they were suffering the consequences of their father's sins rather than of their own.
2. The wicked used it as a proverb against Israel, because the LORD had said God will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation.

**The author of Lamentations wrote:**

- **Lamentations 5:7:** Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities (Lam. 5:7).
- Lamentations is mourning the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple of God and the ruin of Israel's cities, and the destruction of their homes and farms and the sorrowful fact the people of Israel and Judah had been taken captive by Babylon for seventy years. The words:
- **Our fathers sinned:** refers to the gross sins of Judah and Israel prior to the Babylonian captivity.
- **And are no more:** means their fathers have died.
- **We bear their iniquities:** means the children are still suffering because of their parents' iniquities.

The children born during the seventy-year captivity are saying that they are suffering, because of the gross sins and rebellion of their fathers. However, rebellious Judah and corrupt Israel repented, and turned to God during their seventy-year captivity, after which God terminated His judgment against them, and delivered them from their captivity, and those who had survived the captivity and the new generation returned as one faithful nation to their beloved city Jerusalem with great rejoicing and joy.

### **Concerning this period Ezekiel wrote:**

- **Ezekiel 18:2-4:** What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? <sup>3</sup>As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. <sup>4</sup>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.

The LORD will repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, only applies to the generations who continue to follow in the sins of their fathers, if the children of the new generation turn to God, repent, and forsakes their wicked ways God's forgiveness abounds in love and blessings.

### **Following are four examples of children reaping the sins of their fathers:**

1. The children born in the wilderness who suffered for forty years because their fathers refused to enter the Promised Land.
2. The children born in the seventy-year captivity who suffered because their fathers rebelled against God.
3. Children born into nations that teach their populations it is OK to oppress the poor to make greater profits will suffer because of their leader's greed.
4. Eventually we will all suffer the sin of our fathers because every generation who has gone before us has plundered the earth, we live upon rather than caring for it.

But in regards to eternal life, each individual person is held accountable before God for their own sin. We will either suffer loss according to our corrupt and wicked behaviour and actions or be rewarded according to our good behaviour and good deeds. The apostle Paul wrote:

- **1 Corinthians 3:10-23:** No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup>each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup>If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, they will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If anyone's work is burned up, they will suffer loss, though they themselves will be saved, but only as through fire.

**God is a jealous God:** at the beginning of this study, we read that God is a jealous God (Exod. 20:4-5) (Deut. 5:7-9) since most of us think of jealousy as being a bad thing this statement seems to contradict the nature and character of God, but the word jealous carries two ideas, one good and one bad.

- **Good jealousy,** is to be protective, watchful, and trusting of someone.
- **Bad jealousy,** is to be envious, covetous, resentful, and bitter.

When God is spoken of as being jealous it carries the idea that His only desire for His people is for their well-being, so His wrath and judgment falls upon any nation that brings harm upon His people and should His own people act corruptly or turn to other gods (i.e., commit spiritual adultery against God) they bring God's judgment upon themselves. It is very much like a man who is deeply in love with his wife, and she betrays him by constantly sleeping with another man. The husband of course is not only going to stop buying her gifts and showering her with presents, but is also going to withdraw any favours he has been giving his wife. Likewise, it is with God when His people act corruptly and betray Him by turning to other gods, He withdraws his protective, watchfulness, His trust, and His blessings.

**SUMMARY: God, Visits the Iniquity of the Fathers on the Children:**

God has always, only passed on the iniquity and guilt of the fathers to those who hate the LORD and continued in the wrong doing of their fathers, but He has always forgiven those who love Him and who did what is right. It is the children who deny God and follow on in the same sins as their fathers, that the guilt is passed on to, but if they repent and do what is right God's forgiveness and steadfast love abounds.

**A simple example:** if human parents teach their children that the world was created by a big bang, and therefore there is no God and that it is OK to oppress their workers to make big profits, because that is the system of capitalism, those children will continue in the sins and iniquities of their parents and bear (reap) God's judgment accordingly. But if the children are taught that what their parents have told them is wrong and they accept God and do what is right, God will love, forgive, and bless them.

**Reaping the consequences of our sin:** if a teenage girl believes it is okay to sleep around, and after doing so becomes pregnant, her pregnancy may bring her to see that sex without commitment, and with many guys is wrong, so she changes her lifestyle and repents of her past, she is still going to have the child. This reality, highlights the truth, though the LORD will forgive us, when we repent, we will still reap the consequences of what we have sown, even though we are forgiven.

**CONCLUSION:** each individual person is held accountable for their own sin (i.e., wrongful actions), children will not suffer guilt for the sins of their fathers nor will fathers suffer guilt of their children's sins, for everyone will be judged according to their own sinful actions and die for their own sin, or be rewarded for the goodness they do.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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