

Deuteronomy 24:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

Analysis

Individual responsibility: 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.' This limits corporate punishment—judicial execution applies only to guilty individual, not family. This clarifies earlier passages where families shared judgment (Achan, Joshua 7; Korah, Numbers 16)—those involved corporate covenant violation. But civil justice punishes individual crime individually. Ezekiel 18 develops this: each person bears own guilt. This balances corporate responsibility (families/nations face consequences) with individual accountability (each person judged for own sin). Justice requires discriminating guilty from innocent even in families.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law often executed entire families for one person's crime (collective guilt). Israel's law protected innocent family members. 2 Kings 14:6 shows Amaziah following this law, executing assassins but sparing their children. This distinguished Israelite justice from pagan practice. However, corporate consequences (exodus generation dying for unbelief, exile for national apostasy) still occurred—judgment affects communities, but civil execution targets individuals only. This tension between corporate and individual appears throughout Scripture, resolved fully in Christ (He bore corporate guilt individually, offering salvation individually received while creating corporate body, the church).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do we balance individual responsibility with corporate consequences in families and churches?
2. What is the difference between judicial punishment (individual) and natural consequences (often corporate)?
3. How does Christ bearing corporate guilt individually provide both justice and mercy?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	יוֹמָתוֹ:	אָב וֹת	עַל	וּבְנֵי יִם	וּבְנֵי יִם	לֹא
H3808	be put to death	The fathers	H5921	for the children	for the children	H3808
	H4191	H1		H1121	H1121	
	יוֹמָתוֹ:	עַל	אָב וֹת	אֵשׁ	בְּחַטָּא וֹ	יוֹמָתוֹ:
	be put to death	H5921	The fathers	every man	for his own sin	be put to death
	H4191		H1	H376	H2399	H4191

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 18:20 (Sin): The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

2 Chronicles 25:4 (Sin): But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.

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