

Exodus 20:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Analysis

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Two prohibited actions: 'bow down' (לֹא תִשְׁתַּחַוו, lo-tishtachaveh) and 'serve' (לֹא תִּעֲבֹד, lo ta'ovdem)—worship in posture and practice. God's jealousy (קָנָה, qanna) isn't petty but protective—like a husband's righteous jealousy for his wife. Idolatry is spiritual adultery; God's jealousy guards covenant love. 'Visiting iniquity' (פָּגַע, poqed avon) means consequences of sin ripple through generations—children suffer parents' idolatry's effects (not guilt). Sin has generational impact. But note: four generations of judgment versus thousands of generations of mercy (v. 6)—grace outweighs wrath 250:1. 'Them that hate me' defines idolaters—rejecting God for idols is hatred, however sincere the religiosity.

Historical Context

Ancient covenants invoked curses on violators. God's 'jealousy' uses marriage language—Israel is His bride, idolatry is adultery. The generational consequences reflect observable reality: parents' sins affect children.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How is God's jealousy different from human jealousy—why is it righteous rather than petty?
2. In what ways do parents' sins (especially idolatry) affect subsequent generations?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	תָּשַׂתַּחַן	הָ	לֹא	לַבָּם	כִּי	מַעֲבֵד	מְ	לֹא	לַבָּם	כִּי	מַעֲבֵד	מְ	
H3808	Thou shalt not bow down	H7812	H0	H3808	thyself to them nor serve	H5647	H3588						
אַנְכִּי	לְבָבֵךְ	הִנֵּה	אֱלֹהָי	בְּ	אָלָה	בְּ	אָלָה	בְּ	אָלָה	בְּ	אָלָה	בְּ	
H595	them for I the LORD	H3068	H430	H410	thy God	H7067	H6485	God	am a jealous	visiting			
עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	עֲוֹנִיהָ	
the iniquity	of the fathers	H5921	upon the children	H5921	unto the third	H5921	H8029						
רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה	רְבָעָה						
and fourth	generation of them that hate	H7256	H8130										

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 14:18 (Sin): The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

Deuteronomy 5:9 (Sin): Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,

Deuteronomy 4:24 (References God): For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

Exodus 34:14 (References God): For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:

Joshua 24:19 (Sin): And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

Psalms 109:14 (Sin): Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the LORD; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.

Deuteronomy 6:15 (References God): (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

Joshua 23:7 (References God): That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them:

Jeremiah 32:18 (Sin): Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name,

Nahum 1:2 (References God): God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.