

Exodus 34:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Analysis

God extends mercy to thousands (אלפים, alaphim) but visits iniquity to three or four generations—mercy outweighs judgment 250:1. Yet God 'will by no means clear the guilty' (נָקֵה לא יִנְקַה, naqeh lo yenaqeh)—an emphatic Hebrew construction meaning judgment is certain. This tension between mercy and justice finds resolution only at Calvary, where God's righteousness and love meet (Ps 85:10). The three terms—עֻוּן (avon, iniquity), פְשָׁע (pesha, transgression), חַטָּאת (chatta'ah, sin)—cover all categories of rebellion.

Historical Context

The concept of corporate/generational responsibility was fundamental to ancient covenant society. Children often suffered consequences of parents' sins, yet each generation remained accountable (Ezek 18).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How can God be both just in punishing sin and merciful in forgiving it?
2. What does the ratio of mercy to judgment (thousands vs. 3-4 generations) reveal about God's heart?

Interlinear Text

רָצַע וְשָׁעָרָה נִצְרָן יְמִינָה לְאַלְפִּים וְעַד סָדָה
Keeping mercy for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression

וְמַטָּאת הַיְמִינָה לְאַלְפִּים וְעַד סָדָה
and sin and that will by no means H3808 and that will by no means H5352

עַל בְּנֵי מִם גַּם דָּל וְעַל אָבֹת עַזְוִיל
the guilty visiting iniquity of the fathers H5921 and upon the children's H5921

עַל בְּנֵי מִם עַל בְּנֵי מִם עַל שָׁלִשׁ יְמִינָה
and upon the children's and upon the children's H5921 children unto the third H5921

רַבְעִים:
and to the fourth H7256

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 103:3 (Parallel theme): Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

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,

Ephesians 1:7 (Grace): In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

1 John 1:9 (Sin): If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalms 130:4 (Parallel theme): But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Job 10:14 (Sin): If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.

Exodus 23:7 (Parallel theme): Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

Hebrews 12:29 (Parallel theme): For our God is a consuming fire.

Nahum 1:6 (Parallel theme): Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

Daniel 9:9 (Parallel theme): To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;