

Ezekiel 18:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

Analysis

The proverb "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" expressed fatalistic resignation—children inevitably suffer for parents' sins. God rejects this excuse in verse 3: "ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb." This passage establishes individual moral responsibility before God. While sin has corporate and generational consequences, each person stands accountable for their own choices. The Reformed view of original sin acknowledges inherited corruption (Psalm 51:5) while maintaining personal culpability for actual transgressions (Ezekiel 18:20). God judges both corporate solidarity and individual agency.

Historical Context

The exiles in Babylon (591 BC) blamed their fathers' idolatry for their suffering, denying personal responsibility. This fatalism excused continued rebellion—"we're suffering for previous generations' sins anyway." God confronts this evasion, demanding personal repentance. The proverb appears also in Jeremiah 31:29-30, indicating widespread use. While the second commandment warns of visiting fathers' iniquity on children (Exodus 20:5), this describes consequences not determinism. Each generation must choose covenant faithfulness or rebellion.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do you use generational patterns or family background as excuses for personal sin rather than taking responsibility?
2. What is the relationship between inherited sinfulness and personal accountability before God?

Interlinear Text

עַל	בָּזֶה	הַמְפַשֵּׁל	לְ	אַתָּה	מְשֻׁלִּים	אַתֶּם	לֹכֶד	מֵה
H5921	H2088	H4912	H853	H4911	What mean ye that ye use	H859	H0	H4100
בְּסֵר	וְאָכְלוּ	אַדְמָתָה	לְאָמֵר	יִשְׁבָּא לְ	אָבוֹת	לְאָמֵר	יִשְׁבָּא לְ	מְשֻׁלִּים
sour grapes	have eaten	concerning the land	of Israel	saying	The fathers	concerning the land	of Israel	What mean ye that ye use
H1155	H398	H127	H3478	H559	H1	H127	H3478	H4911
וְשָׁפֵן	בְּבָנֶים	תְּקַנְתִּיבָה	וְשָׁפֵן	יִם	יְמִינָה	וְשָׁפֵן	וְשָׁפֵן	וְשָׁפֵן
teeth	and the children's	are set on edge	H1121	H6949	H8127	H1121	H8127	H6949

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 5:7 (Parallel theme): Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

Ezekiel 37:19 (References Israel): Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.

Isaiah 3:15 (Parallel theme): What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Ezekiel 37:11 (References Israel): Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

Ezekiel 17:12 (Parallel theme): Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon;

Ezekiel 37:25 (Parallel theme): And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

Jeremiah 15:4 (Parallel theme): And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

Romans 9:20 (Parallel theme): Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Matthew 23:36 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Ezekiel 25:3 (References Israel): And say unto the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity;