

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

מָה	לְכֶם	אַתֶּם	מִשְׁלִים	אֵת	הַמֶּשֶׁל	הַזֶּה	עַל
H4100	H0	H859		H853		H2088	H5921
			What mean ye that ye use		this proverb		
			H4911		H4912		
אֲדָמָה	לְיִשְׂרָאֵל	לֵאמֹר	אֲבוֹת	יֵאָכְלוּ	בִּסְרֵי		
concerning the land	of Israel	saying	The fathers	have eaten	sour grapes		
H127	H3478	H559	H1	H398	H1155		
וְשֵׁנֵי	הַבָּנִים	תִּקְהִינָה:					
teeth	and the children's	are set on edge					
H8127	H1121	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;