

Jeremiah 31:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Analysis

This proverb reflected a fatalistic attitude: 'The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' The people claimed they were suffering for their ancestors' sins, not their own—essentially denying personal responsibility and blaming previous generations. God declares this excuse will no longer apply in the new covenant era. While it is true that sin has generational consequences (Exodus 20:5), each person also bears responsibility for their own choices.

The following verse (31:30) clarifies: 'every one shall die for his own iniquity.' The new covenant will bring clarity regarding individual accountability. Ezekiel addresses this same proverb extensively (Ezekiel 18), emphasizing that 'the soul that sinneth, it shall die'—not the children for the fathers' sin, nor the fathers for the children's sin. This establishes the principle of personal moral responsibility before God.

For Christians, this finds fulfillment in the gospel. While we all inherit Adam's sin nature and its consequences (original sin), each person is also judged for their own deeds (Romans 2:6). Christ bore the punishment for the sins of all who believe (2 Corinthians 5:21), but each individual must personally repent and believe. We cannot ride on our parents' faith or blame our families for our own unfaithfulness. Every person stands before God individually accountable.

Historical Context

The exilic generation was tempted to view themselves as innocent victims punished for King Manasseh's sins (2 Kings 23:26). While Manasseh's idolatry did have devastating long-term consequences, the generation facing exile was equally guilty of covenant breaking. This proverb allowed them to evade responsibility. God's correction insisted they acknowledge their own guilt, a necessary prerequisite for genuine repentance.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. In what ways might we be tempted to blame our circumstances on previous generations rather than taking responsibility for our own choices?
2. How does the gospel balance the reality that we inherit sin's consequences (original sin) with personal accountability for our own sin?
3. What does it mean to 'die for one's own iniquity' in light of Christ bearing our sins on the cross?

Interlinear Text

בָּמָיִם	בָּמָיִם	לֹא	בָּהֶם	וְאָמַרְתִּי	עַד	אָבָות
In those days	H1992	H3808	they shall say	H559	H5750	no more The fathers
H3117						H1

אָכְלָה	בָּרָא	וְשָׁפֵן	בָּנִים	תַּחֲבִיןָה:
have eaten	a sour grape	teeth	and the children's	are set on edge
H398	H1155	H8127	H1121	H6949

Additional Cross-References

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

Jeremiah 31:30 (Parallel theme): But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org