

Jeremiah 32:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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,

Analysis

Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands—The Hebrew chesed (חֶסֶד) denotes covenant loyalty, steadfast love, unfailing kindness—God's committed faithfulness to His covenant people despite their unfaithfulness. **Unto thousands** echoes Exodus 20:6, where God shows chesed to thousands of generations of those who love Him. This contrasts with the following phrase: **and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them**, which references God's justice visiting consequences of sin on subsequent generations (Exodus 20:5, 34:7). The Hebrew shalam (שָׁלָם, recompense) means to complete, make whole, or repay—God's justice ensuring that sin's consequences are not ignored.

This paradox—God's mercy extending to thousands while also judging sin—troubled many interpreters. The key is that chesed far outweighs judgment (thousands of generations versus three or four). Moreover, Ezekiel 18 clarified that children who turn from their fathers' sins are not punished for them—the 'visiting' of iniquity refers to consequences, not guilt. Jeremiah himself affirmed this principle (Jeremiah 31:29-30). **The Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name**—El haggadol haggibbor (אֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר) emphasizes God's absolute power and authority. He is both tenderly loving (chesed) and fearfully just, both merciful and holy. This dual nature is resolved in Christ, where God's justice and mercy meet at the cross (Romans 3:25-26).

Historical Context

Jeremiah's prayer wrestles with the theological problem facing his generation: they were experiencing the devastating consequences of centuries of covenant unfaithfulness. The Babylonian exile was divine judgment for persistent idolatry, social injustice, and rejection of prophetic warnings (2 Kings 17:7-23, Jeremiah 25:3-11). Yet Jeremiah also knew God had promised restoration (Jeremiah 29:10-14, 31:31-34). How could God's judgment be reconciled with His covenant loyalty? This verse acknowledges both realities—God's chesed endures even as His justice operates. The exilic generation bore consequences of their fathers' sins (the dynasty of Manasseh's wickedness particularly hastened judgment, 2 Kings 23:26-27), yet those who turned to God with whole hearts would experience His chesed. The return from exile under Cyrus's decree (538 BC) demonstrated this principle: judgment was real and severe, but God's covenant faithfulness outlasted the judgment and brought restoration.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does God's chesed (steadfast love) extending to thousands of generations provide assurance even when experiencing consequences of past sins?
2. What does this verse teach about the relationship between God's mercy and justice?
3. How does the cross of Christ ultimately resolve the tension between God's lovingkindness and His requirement to judge sin?

Interlinear Text

עַשְׂתָּה	צַדְקָה	לְאֵלֹף יָמִים	וּמְשֻׁלָּם	עַזְוִיל
Thou shewest	lovingkindness	unto thousands	and recompensest	the iniquity
H6213	H2617	H505	H7999	H5771
אָבָות	אֶל	בְּיֹתְרָה	בְּנֵי	אָמֵן
of the fathers	H413	into the bosom	of their children	after
H1	H2436	H1121	H310	H410
בָּגְדוֹל	וְרָא	הַגָּבֵעַ	אָבָא	שְׁמוֹןָ
them the Great	the Mighty	the LORD	of hosts	is his name
H1419	H1368	H3068	H6635	H8034

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 10:16 (References Lord): The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts is his name.

Exodus 34:7 (Sin): 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.

Isaiah 10:21 (References God): The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

Isaiah 9:6 (References God): For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 57:15 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Matthew 27:25 (Parallel theme): Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

Deuteronomy 10:17 (References God): For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:

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.

Nehemiah 1:5 (References God): And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

Habakkuk 1:12 (References God): Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.