

Job 21:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it.

Analysis

Job quotes his friends' theology: "God layeth up his [the wicked man's] iniquity for his children." The Hebrew tsaphan (תְּפַנֵּן, "layeth up") means to treasure or store, suggesting God reserves punishment. The phrase "he rewardeth him, and he shall know it" uses shalam (שָׁלָם, "rewardeth")—to recompense or repay. Job is critiquing vicarious punishment theology: why should the wicked man's children suffer for his sins when the man himself prospers? This challenges collective guilt concepts while affirming individual accountability. Reformed theology, grounded in Ezekiel 18:20 ("The soul that sinneth, it shall die"), recognizes that God's justice is ultimately personal, not merely corporate. Yet Job's protest also anticipates the mystery of Christ bearing sins not His own—vicarious punishment that leads to redemption rather than mere retribution.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern legal codes (Hammurabi, Hittite laws) often included punishments extending to offenders' families. Exodus 20:5 speaks of God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children," but Deuteronomy 24:16 prohibits punishing children for fathers' crimes in human courts. Job's question addresses this tension: if earthly justice should be individual, why would divine justice operate collectively? This anticipates Ezekiel's explicit teaching on individual responsibility.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Job's critique of vicarious punishment illuminate the unique nature of Christ's substitutionary atonement?
2. What does this passage teach about the relationship between corporate and individual aspects of sin and judgment?
3. How should we respond when we see innocent people suffer consequences of others' wickedness?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהִים יְצִפֵּן אֶל־וּבָנָיו אֶוְנֵה לְבָנָיו אֶשְׁלָחֵן
God layeth up for his children his iniquity he rewardeth
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him and he shall know

H3045

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:5 (Sin): Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Isaiah 14:21 (Sin): Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities.

Jeremiah 31:29 (Parallel theme): In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Ezekiel 18:2 (Parallel theme): 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?

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