

Joel 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

Analysis

This verse institutes a three-generation mandate for transmitting knowledge of God's judgment. The command "Tell ye your children of it" uses the Hebrew verb saphar, meaning to recount, rehearse, or declare with careful detail. This isn't casual mention but deliberate, formal instruction—what Deuteronomy 6:6-7 commands regarding God's law: "thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." The repetition emphasizes multi-generational faithfulness as essential for covenant continuity.

The three-generational structure ("your children... their children... another generation") ensures perpetual remembrance. This pattern appears throughout Scripture: God identifies Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"—a three-generation witness to covenant faithfulness. Psalm 78:4-7 similarly commands: "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD... that they should make them known to their children." The pattern establishes intergenerational accountability—each generation must faithfully transmit truth to the next.

Theologically, this verse affirms the covenant family structure as God's primary means of preserving truth. Unlike modern individualism that isolates faith, Scripture presents covenant faithfulness as fundamentally generational. Parents bear responsibility to catechize children in God's works, words, and ways. The Passover celebration institutionalized this principle—when children ask "What mean ye by this service?" parents must explain God's redemptive acts (Exodus

12:26-27). Joel's command ensures that future generations will recognize God's patterns of judgment and mercy, preparing them for the final Day of the LORD.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite culture was profoundly familial and generational. Unlike modern Western society's emphasis on individual autonomy, ancient Near Eastern identity derived from family, clan, and tribe. The household (bet 'av, "father's house") functioned as the basic social, economic, and religious unit. Children learned trades, customs, laws, and faith primarily through family instruction rather than formal schooling.

The command to tell children reflects the Shema's prescription (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) to teach God's commandments "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." This comprehensive instruction made theology inseparable from daily life. Festivals like Passover, Tabernacles, and Weeks included educational components where fathers explained historical events to children, embedding theology in practiced ritual.

Three-generation transmission reflects typical ancient lifespan and family structure. With marriage occurring in mid-teens and life expectancy around 60-70 years for those surviving childhood, three generations often coexisted. Grandparents held honored status as wisdom-bearers and living links to the past. The patriarchal narratives demonstrate this pattern—Abraham knew his great-great-great-great grandfather Shem; Isaac knew his grandfather Abraham; Jacob knew Isaac. This living chain of testimony preserved redemptive history until written Scripture solidified the record for all subsequent generations.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What responsibility do you bear to teach the next generation about God's character, works, and Word?
2. How can the church recover the biblical model of multi-generational discipleship in an increasingly age-segregated culture?
3. What specific acts of God's judgment and mercy should you ensure your children and spiritual children understand?

Interlinear Text

עַל יְה	וּבְנֵי מ	סְפִ רֹא	וּבְנֵי מ	וּבְנֵי מ
H5921	and their children	Tell	and their children	and their children
H1121		H5608	H1121	H1121
וּבְנֵי מ	לְדֹ וְר	אֶחָר:		
and their children	generation	another		
H1121	H1755	H312		

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 6:7 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Psalms 145:4 (Parallel theme): One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.

Psalms 71:18 (Parallel theme): Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

Exodus 13:14 (Parallel theme): And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage:

Isaiah 38:19 (Parallel theme): The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.

Psalms 44:1 (Parallel theme): We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.

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