

Lamentations 5:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

Analysis

A troubling complaint: "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities" (avoteinu khatu einam anakhnu avonoteihem savalnu, אָבוֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ, אֵינָם אָנַחְנוּ עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם סָבַלְנוּ). This became a popular proverb, quoted in Ezekiel 18:2: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The complaint suggests injustice—we're suffering for previous generations' sins. Ezekiel 18 refutes this, emphasizing individual responsibility: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (18:4, 20). Jeremiah 31:29-30 similarly promises that in the new covenant, people die for their own sin, not others'. Yet there's truth to generational consequences: Exodus 20:5 warns God "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." How to reconcile? Corporate solidarity is real—children do suffer consequences of parental sin (alcoholism, poverty, broken families, bad theology). But this doesn't excuse individual sin. The exile generation wasn't innocent; they persisted in their fathers' sins (Jeremiah 7:25-26).

Historical Context

The complaint reflects genuine suffering: the exile generation experienced consequences of sins committed under Manasseh (687-642 BC), who reigned 55 years in severe apostasy (2 Kings 21:1-16). 2 Kings 23:26-27 states that despite Josiah's reforms, "the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath...because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." So people living in 586 BC faced judgment for Manasseh's sins decades earlier. Yet

they weren't innocent: Jeremiah 7:9-10 catalogs their current sins. Ezekiel 18's point is that each generation must own its response to God. Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:4-19) models the proper approach: he identifies with previous generations' sins while confessing the current generation's guilt. He doesn't say 'They sinned, we're innocent' but 'We have sinned' (9:5, 8, 11, 15). True repentance acknowledges both inherited consequences and personal guilt.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do we balance acknowledging generational consequences of sin with accepting personal responsibility for our own choices?
2. What inherited consequences (family patterns, cultural sins, historical injustices) affect us, and how should we respond?
3. How does Christ break the cycle of generational sin and its consequences for believers (Galatians 3:13-14, Colossians 1:13-14)?

Interlinear Text

אֲבוֹתֵינוּ	חָטְאוּ	אֵינָם	אֶנְיֹנָם	עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם	סָבְלָנוּ:
Our fathers	have sinned	and are not		their iniquities	and we have borne
H1	H2398	H369	H587	H5771	H5445

Additional Cross-References

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.

Jeremiah 16:12 (Parallel theme): And ye have done worse than your fathers; for, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me:

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?

Jeremiah 14:20 (Sin): We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee.

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;

Jeremiah 31:15 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.

Genesis 42:36 (Parallel theme): And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

Job 7:8 (Parallel theme): The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.

Job 7:21 (Sin): And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

Zechariah 1:5 (Parallel theme): Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?