

Psalms 85:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?

Analysis

Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? These rhetorical questions express anguished concern that God's anger might continue indefinitely. The Hebrew form expects negative answer: "Surely you won't be angry forever?" The psalmist appeals to God's covenant character—His anger, though righteous, is temporary; His mercy endures forever (Psalm 30:5, 103:8-9). The questions aren't accusations but appeals grounded in revealed truth about God's nature.

"Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?" (הָלְעֹלָם תִּאֱנָף-בָּנֶנוּ, hale'olam te'enaf banu, uses le'olam (לְעוֹלָם), meaning "forever, perpetually, to the vanishing point." The verb anaph (אֱנָף) means "to be angry, to breathe hard with anger." The question acknowledges present divine anger but pleads that it not continue eternally. This appeal rests on scriptural precedent—God's anger is rega (רָגָע, "a moment," Psalm 30:5), but His favor is chaim (חַיָּה, "life/lifetime").

"Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?" (timshokh apekha ledor vador, תִּמְשֹׁךְ אֶפְעָם לְדָר בָּדָר) intensifies the concern. Mashakh (מְשֹׁךְ) means "to draw, drag, extend"—stretching something beyond natural length. Dor vador (דָּר בָּדָר, "generation to generation") emphasizes perpetual duration. The question fears that children and grandchildren will suffer for ancestors' sins indefinitely. Exodus 20:5 warns God visits "iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," but also shows mercy to thousands of generations (Exodus 20:6). The psalmist appeals to this greater mercy.

Historical Context

The fear of generational judgment wasn't abstract theology but lived reality for post-exilic Jews. They suffered consequences of their ancestors' sins—the exile resulted from generations of accumulated rebellion (2 Kings 17:7-23, Jeremiah 25:1-11). Ezekiel 18 addresses this very concern: exiles complained "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). God responded that individuals die for their own sin, not ancestors' sin, if they personally repent (Ezekiel 18:19-20). Yet corporate national consequences did extend across generations. The question in Psalm 85:5 pleads: Will restoration be complete, or will residual divine anger affect our descendants? This reflects biblical tension between individual and corporate responsibility, immediate and generational consequences.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How can believers balance the biblical truth that God's anger is temporary (Psalm 30:5) with passages warning of eternal judgment for unrepentant sinners?
2. What does it mean that God 'visits iniquity to the third and fourth generation,' and how does this relate to His mercy to thousands of generations?
3. How should Christians think about generational consequences of sin while affirming that individuals bear responsibility for their own choices (Ezekiel 18)?

Interlinear Text

מִלְעָזֶל	פָּאָגֵף	בְּנֵי	תִּמְשֵׁךְ	אַפְּנֵי
with us for ever	Wilt thou be angry	בְּנֵי	wilt thou draw out	thine anger
H5769	H599	H0	H4900	H639
אַדְרָה	אַדְרָה			
generations	generations			
H1755	H1755			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 79:5 (Parallel theme): How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire?

Psalms 80:4 (Parallel theme): O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?

Psalms 74:1 (Parallel theme): O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?

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